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Stu Mackay, Yukon College--Leadership in Technology/Distance Education; The University of the Arctic; Collaboration with Northern Colleges.

This is the next interview in the [continuing series](#) of Computing Canada's (CC) [Blogged Down](#) (BD) which is featured here "first" in the Canadian IT Managers (CIM) forum.

In this blog series, we continue our talk with Stu Mackay, Dean at Yukon College—a leader in innovative educational programs and advanced delivery of these programs.

Thank you and Enjoy!

Stephen Ibaraki, [FCIPS](#), [I.S.P.](#), [MVP](#)



Stephen: Yukon College is an innovative leader in the use of technology, and distance education. Profile these contributions in more detail? Where do you see this heading into 2007 and beyond?

Stu: About 6 years ago, the sitting Yukon government had a vision to connect all Yukoners with broadband access. This initiative provided the College with excellent bandwidth to most of our communities and gave our "early adopters" a wonderful opportunity to challenge our traditional practices of course and program delivery.

From the beginning, our philosophy has been that we need to meet the learners where they at and with the technology that they have available to them. Practically, this meant that we did not invest in one educational technology such as Blackboard or WebCT but we developed tools in many areas ranging from our own Video/DVD and paper based production to interactive video conferencing and web

casting.

Although we are able to serve the Yukon well, we did not have the bandwidth to connect to the "south". Two years ago, with the assistance of Canarie, a 10 Mbps link was made to the national optical network for education and research (CA*net4). Now we can expand our services.

This new connectivity comes with some new challenges. No longer is it required for Yukoners to travel to southern destinations to partake in training. The opportunities can be brought to their communities and even to their desktop. This is not an easy task as many of the southern institutions are not established to provide their services via education technologies - especially in the more interactive modalities. I see the College engaging these institutions to develop their capabilities for mutual benefits.

Stephen: You have an interesting circumpolar international alliance. Can you describe this program and the value it provides? How will this evolve in 2007 to 2010?

Stu: Yukon College is a proud founding member of The University of the Arctic. UArctic is a cooperative network of universities, colleges, and other organizations committed to higher education and research in the North. Members share resources, facilities, and expertise to build and offer post-secondary education programs that are relevant and accessible to northern students.

A major component of this collaboration is the Bachelor of Circumpolar Studies Program (BCS). It is a way for students attending University of the Arctic institutions to learn more about the North, with courses held in the classroom, online, in the field and around the world. Using both academic and traditional indigenous knowledge, the Circumpolar Studies Program lets students learn about the lands, peoples and issues of the Circumpolar World. It prepares students for advanced study or professional employment in diverse fields, such as (but not limited to) sustainable resource management, self-government, Arctic engineering, and northern tourism.

Yukon College is able to work with students who wish to pursue Circumpolar Studies to a Bachelor degree. As a 2-year community college, the College does not, at this time, offer the full degree program. However, we are able to assist students with two and, in some cases, up to three years, of course work towards a BCS at another UArctic-member institution.

In the future, I believe Yukon College will pursue the ability to grant its own degrees and develop a specific emphasis or specialization that will allow us to share our expertise in areas such as First Nations Self-Governance, climate change and cold weather technologies.



Ruti Morbin IT Pro Advisor
Microsoft Canada



John Osley Director Community Evangelism
Microsoft Canada



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Stephen: You are working with other northern colleges on collaborating in technology education. Can you speak to this program: mission, objectives, and outcomes in 2007-2010?

Stu: Information Technology and Communications Programs at the many northern colleges have experienced frequent changes in program content and variations in student numbers over the past 5 years. Although there continues to be strong industry labour force growth, each college is challenged by their ability to maintain instructor currency and renewal, meet the emerging specialization needs of the industry, provide adequate capital for infrastructure improvements, and recruit/retain students. Where these issues may be overwhelming for a single institution, the increasing availability of educational technologies can provide an opportunity for greater collaboration and sharing between institutions. For these reasons, we have established a working group with representation from Northern Lights College, College of New Caledonia, Northwest Community College and ourselves, to explore ways we may be able to overcome these challenges.

Over the next few years, we will be sharing and examining our programs and quantifying the education technology capabilities at each institution. Working with our industry partners and accreditation organizations, such as CIPS, it is hoped that this initiative will create greater access to the ICT education and training without the additional expenses associated with moving to a new community. It will also allow the institutions to respond to new emerging needs of the industry by providing a larger pool of expertise and instructional experience and make specialized training more widely available at a reasonable cost. No small order!!

In the next blog, Stu will talk about:

- CIPS accreditation for Yukon College;
- Mission for 2007 and beyond;
- Top challenges facing the educational community in the future and their solutions.

I also encourage you to share your thoughts here on these interviews or send me an e-mail at sibaraki@cips.ca.

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