



# Community Impact

## School Uses New Technology to Help Community

The School of Management and the Not For Profit Resource Center, an initiative of the United Way of Buffalo and Erie County, are partnering to help local community service agencies through an innovative new educational technology, Digital Access.

Belmont Shelter Corp., The Center for Hospice and Palliative Care, Child Care Resource Network, Compass House, Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Buffalo, Economic Self-Sufficiency Coalition of Western New York, Every Person Influences Children (EPIC), Exotic Cat Rescue, Girl Scout Council of Buffalo and Erie County, and Southeast Works are among the agencies that are or will be making use of this new technology.

“Digital Access is our name for a process known generically as course casting,” says Professor Natalie Simpson, academic director of Digital Access in the School of Management. She explains that with Digital Access, a conventional presentation is captured from the attendee’s point of view, to make that same experience available to a wider audience. “Because the equipment is built discreetly into the

room, it’s a noninvasive process,” says Simpson, “There are no cameras in your face to disrupt the flow of information or distract the interaction of the participants.”

In a new and very exciting application of the Digital Access process, health and human services agencies are participating in a program called “Community Access” using UB’s Digital Access classrooms to record their training and educational sessions. Almost immediately after each session is recorded, it can be viewed online via UB’s streaming server and linked to the organization’s Web site.

Most not-for-profit organizations do not have access to course-casting equipment and buying it is cost prohibitive. Through Community Access, however, organizations are able to use UB’s Digital Access and the faculty expertise that goes with it, enabling them to reduce costs and eliminate inconsistencies in the delivery of education and training sessions to service recipients, volunteers and staff.

For example, instead of holding the same training session each time a new volunteer joins their group, Compass House has volunteers view the training online. “Prior to Community Access, our options were to wait until we had a small group of volunteers to train, which left us little flexibility in scheduling,” says Joan Dutchess Freidson, program director of Compass House. “Or we had to train them one-on-one, which was very labor intensive.”

Tara Vogel, chief operating officer of Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Buffalo, says that Community Access helped her organization eliminate a great deal of redundancy. “For certain types of counseling sessions, 50 percent of the material is the same from one client to the next,” she says. “With Community Access, we have recorded that portion of



Natalie Simpson  
Academic Director  
of Digital Access

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Photo: LoPresto Photography

our training, and our clients view it in a video format. This allows us to spend more time with clients one-on-one, discussing the issues that are specific to them.”

The benefits cut across several areas, according to Vogel. “Community Access has not only created consistency in our presentations,” she says. “It also has reduced agency expenses and increased productivity of the counseling staff.”

Terri Flaherty, housing programs manager at Belmont Shelter Corp., says Community Access has enabled her organization to expand who they serve and how they serve them. “Being a not-for-profit can limit you in your ability to use the latest technology to enhance the services you provide your clients,” she says. “We’ve been able to cut down on the number of hours we put into training and seminars without reducing their quantity or quality. It’s been a great time saver and a great asset. We can’t wait until the next session so that we can take advantage of this opportunity again.”

Several noteworthy features make Digital Access different from just videotaping a session. “When viewing a session captured through Digital Access, you get an interesting sense of intimacy because of the camera frame size,” Simpson says. “There is relatively no distance between the viewer and the close-up view of the presenter. Rather than feeling like they are watching something from the back of a large room, viewers enjoy the comfortable illusion of a smaller space.”

Another key feature of Digital Access is the viewer’s control. “In addition to being able to watch a session when and where they wish, viewers can run the presentation at their own pace,” says Simpson. “They can pause it, take notes, slow it down or repeat it as necessary. They are in charge.”

Joe Roccisano, director of the Not For Profit Resource Center, works with the School of Management to identify agencies that could benefit from Community Access. “The unique and innovative nature of Community Access has made this collaboration absolutely extraordinary in its ability to help our not-for-profit agencies,” he says.

The pilot project was started with two organizations, Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Buffalo and Compass House. In the next session, 18 representatives from eight organizations attended, and many already are using the process in various ways. Scheduling for the third session is in progress and there is already a waiting list.

Cynthia Shore, assistant dean for corporate and community relations in the School of Management, says that Community Access reflects the leadership role that the School of Management has taken in UB’s mission to be an active supporter of Western New York’s non-for-profit community.

To view a sample of a digital video proceeding, visit <http://uwbec.org/notforprofitDAL.htm> and click “on-line demonstration.”



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Joe Roccisano  
Director, Not For Profit Resource Center