

# Northern Distance Learning

**William Logan, Beaufort Delta Northern Distance Learning Coordinator**

Northern Distance Learning (NDL) was an initiative that started in 2010, to provide academic courses to communities that did not have the resources to offer them. Before Northern Distance Learning the only option for students to take academic courses in some communities was to enroll in Alberta Distance Education, which students found very little success in as the learning was completely asynchronous.

Northern Distance Learning wanted to add a synchronous approach to the learning and accomplished this through videoconferencing where students from the communities dial into a live class that is being taught by teachers in Inuvik. The program also adapted asynchronous learning, where students log into a Learning Management System called Moodle which has course material uploaded ready for them to learn on their own. Northern Distance Learning gave students an opportunity to get guidance and teaching from teachers who were experts in their curriculum every day, very similar to students who take a traditional brick and mortar class. As a result the success rate in these academic courses was much higher than it was in Alberta Distance Education.

Northern Distance Learning started out as a Beaufort Delta Education Council (BDEC) Initiative with one community school, a webcam and a simple internet

connection. Soon after, the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) saw the potential for this program in that students in small communities could have regular access to all the most difficult high school courses that can be taken in the NWT. Many schools in the territory cannot provide these courses sometimes because there are not enough students interested, or there are not enough teachers. These courses are the kind that make you immediately ready for a post secondary institution like college, trade school, and university. Of course you have to get good grades! Northern Distance Learning could solve this. Students who want to take Physics 20 or 30 for example, could join other students online through videoconferencing to make up a whole class. With the help of the GNWT, BDEC has been able to make advancements in technology with webcams being replaced by 80" videoconferencing units, better internet connections, and well developed online resources.

These advancements have helped the program grow to where we have 6 teachers from East Three Secondary School in Inuvik offering 19 different courses to 50+ students from 11 community schools from 5 different Education Councils. Northern Distance Learning has also had 26 students who have graduated including 3 from Uluhaktok.

Sitting down grade 11 NDL student Kyran from Uluhaktok, here is what he had to say about the program.....



Students participate in a Math class  
Above: Uluhaktok, Below: Fort Liard



## What was your First Impressions of Distance Learning as a new Student to the Program?

I thought it was pretty different, and it was much harder than other classes I had taken, but not too bad, it presented a new challenge in my education.

## How do you compare NDL to a Brick and Mortar classroom?

Sometimes you feel a little less connected to the teacher as they are not right in the room, but it is not too bad as the teacher is always willing to help, but that would be the biggest difference.

## What Advice would you give new students joining NDL?

Be ready to work independently, taking academic level courses has to be something you truly want otherwise you will not be successful. Just treat it like a regular classroom; everything is basically the same it is just a different method of delivery. Do not be shy, your teacher is there to help and when

you don't understand speak up it will really help with your studies.

## After being in NDL for two years now, how do you feel about the program?

I feel more prepared for University, this program has opened up learning opportunities that I did not have before, I am a more independent learner and this program has made me more enthusiastic about learning. I feel I can take on many other challenges because of what I learned here.

With such a high success rate compared to other forms of distance learning, NDL has plans to expand to 20 different communities across the Northwest Territories by the 2021-2022 school year. NDL will offer all of the Academic Level Math, Science, English and Art courses, providing students with the opportunity to graduate from their home community and go onto a Post-Secondary Institution without the need to upgrade.

Below: Jessie Curell (in white) presents a digital story workshop in Megan McCaffery's English Language Arts class.

