

Education adapts to changing times

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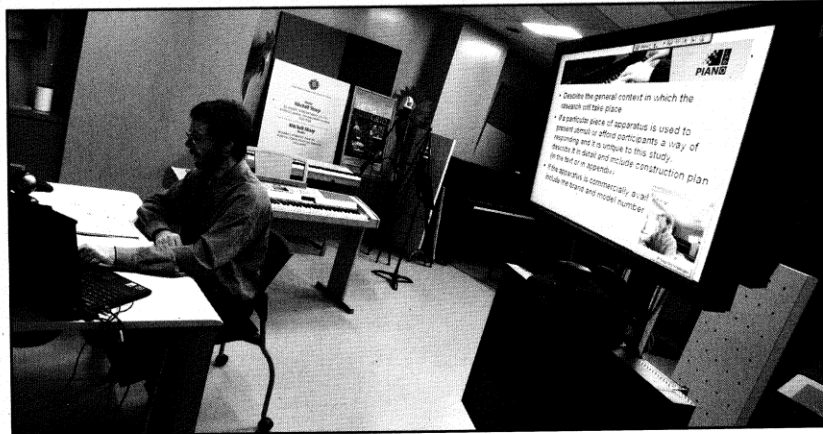


Photo - Robert Lacombe

Professor Gilles Comeau, coordinator of the piano pedagogy and musical education sectors, during one of his piano pedagogy courses offered via audio-video conferencing.

Balancing work and family life in today's rushed world is a challenge for the best of us. Just the thought of attending university classes seems like the impossible. But does this mean that we must wait until Baby leaves home before upgrading our education? Not when distance education presents itself as an excellent alternative to today's busy schedules.

In September 2008, the University of Ottawa's Piano Pedagogy Research Laboratory launched two innovative new programs available through audio-video conferencing: an undergraduate certificate in piano pedagogy and a graduate certificate in piano pedagogy research. Distance education is no longer about correspondence classes or gathering in a local school classroom to watch a professor in a distant city. For this course, students use a high-speed Internet connection to participate. They also listen to the professor and join in real-time classroom discussions by using a 1-800 number.

According to Professor Gilles Comeau, initiator of the project, the program was promoted to piano teachers nation-wide as a way of upgrading their qualifications. Enrolment exceeded expectations

from the beginning. Students from across the country registered for the courses despite time-zone differences. Some students in British Columbia were taking classes at 8:30 a.m. Ottawa time!

Ivea Mark, a Calgarian mother of two, works as a piano teacher in the evenings and has taken three classes in the graduate program. "This is the only way I could have taken a course like this," said Mark. "Moving to Ottawa to take the course could never have been an option for me."

Mark says that although it took her a while to get used to the feeling of isolation that sometime arises while watching the class from home, it didn't take long for the other distance education students to form a bond fostered through email, conference calls and chat. "Some people think that distance education isn't as serious as being in a classroom," says Mark. "But this is one of the hardest and most compelling classes I've ever taken!"

For more information on this program, visit the Piano Pedagogy Research Laboratory site at www.piano.uOttawa.ca/home_en.htm or the Centre for Continuing Education site at www.continue.uOttawa.ca.