

PROFILE

Name: Gateway Technical College

Location: Racine, WI

Founded: 1911

CHALLENGE

Use interactive, engaging teaching approaches to enable career and technical education students to participate in classes with minimal travel and give students opportunities to learn from professionals working in a variety of technical fields.

SOLUTION

Use Epson® BrightLink® Pro interactive solutions and video conferencing systems to connect students and instructors seamlessly in classrooms and around the world.

A New Tool in the Toolbox

BrightLink Pro Takes Video Conferencing to a New Level at Gateway Technical College

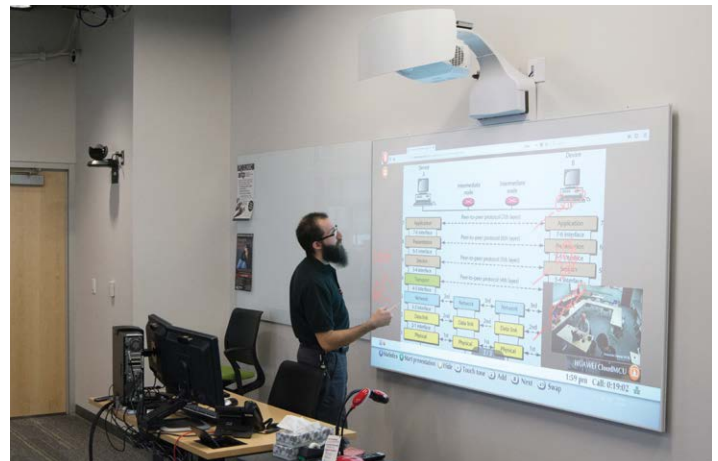
The Epson BrightLink Pro is becoming an essential tool for video-based distance learning.

At least that's the case at Gateway Technical College, which serves students on three campuses, five centers, and multiple high schools in its Southeastern Wisconsin district. Gateway serves nine high schools through its VANguard initiative, a video conferencing program that brings college-level programming to high school students in their local school settings.

"Our staff really likes the interactivity—not only the ability to annotate over a slide, but to control the computer from the whiteboard," explains Jeffrey Zellmer, Computer/ Infrastructure Technician. "They feel more engaged, and their students are definitely more engaged."

The rise of PowerPoint has led some instructors to sit at a lectern and just click through slides, not really interacting with the students or the content. "What the BrightLink does," adds Jeffrey Robshaw, Chief Information Officer, "is allow our instructors to teach interactively. This creates more eye contact and allows them to engage students during video conferencing sessions."

"Teaching from the whiteboard is more natural, and that comes through even over video," Zellmer adds. "Our far-end students can see the slides and annotations in real time, and they can see the instructor well enough to sense how excited he or she is to be teaching."



For all of those reasons, Gateway is in the process of upgrading its classrooms from traditional projectors to interactive, so far purchasing 50 Epson BrightLink Pro 1430Wi interactive displays, packaged with Da-Lite 87" or 100" whiteboards.

"It's the best product we have found, certainly ahead of the curve," says Robshaw.

More Engaging Instruction

Gateway Technical College is a two-year technical college offering associate degrees in engineering, computer science, nursing, veterinary technology, firefighter, EMT and other technical and vocational areas. Classes have an intimate feeling, most with 30 students or less.

"They feel more engaged, and their students are definitely more engaged."

—JEFFREY ZELLMER, COMPUTER/INFRASTRUCTURE TECHNICIAN

The need to base each of these programs at specific campuses has led the technology group to add a practical, video-based distance learning component to its offerings. Video allows students at any campus to participate in classes in many programs with minimal travel.

In addition, Gateway offers college-level classes at nine area high schools via the video conferencing systems. The video conferencing delivery model has been very well received, Zellmer says. Students can earn college credit while still in high school, the high schools use Gateway's equipment for their own school-to-school distance learning, and Gateway gives potential new students a chance to sample the quality of its offerings.

To make all of this possible, every Gateway multimedia classroom has an installed projector, a dedicated desktop computer, laptop inputs, a document camera and an Extron control system, with an Extron switcher/scaler and HDBaseT media network. About 50 have BrightLink Pro interactive solutions instead of standard projectors, and the school owns about 75 video conferencing endpoints, the majority permanently installed with a hardware-based codec and two PTZ cameras. The rest are mounted on rolling carts, allowing staff to set up a video conference in almost any classroom or lab learning space.

"We have two 20-port bridges, as well," Robshaw adds, "giving us the ability to bridge 40 connections at the same time."

Zellmer is experimenting with lower-cost software-based codecs, however, together with cloud-based bridging options. They hope that, within the next four years, nearly every classroom will have installed video conferencing capabilities and a BrightLink Pro.

Simplifying the Technology

One of the strengths of a good technical college is that it uses adjunct instructors with real world experience in the fields they teach. "In many of our programs, whether welding, automotive, nursing, veterinary or aviation, our instructors are working professionals," Zellmer says. One downside of that approach is that instructors don't work with the classroom technology every day. "That makes it imperative to keep the AV system controls and interactive whiteboarding devices really, really simple," he says.

Zellmer says the technology team offers training sessions for instructors who have not used the BrightLink before, but they often pick it up on their own or from other teachers. "We show them how to use the pens, how to save a screen and page



through saved screens. We also show them how to leverage the connected PC¹," he says.

Training is a simple task because the BrightLink Pro acts like a touch screen on a huge Windows or Apple laptop, with the addition of a simple drawing/annotation program. Instructors can use an electronic 'marker' to control the PC, or just use their fingers, like any other touch screen.

Zellmer and Robshaw are experimenting, as well, with connecting the BrightLink Pro to multiple computers over the network¹, say in a computer lab or at a far-end classroom. They get a cleaner image this way than going through a video conferencing codec, and teachers and students at various locations can manipulate a shared screen image, even if they don't have a BrightLink Pro at their location. "We see its value in many of our engineering classes, where there are a lot of drawings being shared," Zellmer says.

It was the engineering group that taught with the first BrightLink interactive displays Zellmer purchased, back in the fall of 2016. "They were really excited to have them," he recalls, "and the excitement spread from there." He says the technology group next put six BrightLink Pros in their police academy on the Kenosha campus, and from there installed them into classrooms on every campus.

Easy to Support

One reason the school has moved quickly to adopt the BrightLink Pro is the ability of Zellmer and his colleagues to handle all installations and maintenance in-house. "In our backend, we've been moving toward a digital infrastructure, with about 80 percent of our classrooms using HDBaseT technology and twisted pair wiring." He says the BrightLink Pro fits nicely into this environment. "I'm able to monitor each BrightLink from my

Extron control system, which sends me an email if there's any kind of fault or when the bulb will need to be replaced soon."

Zellmer says he appreciates the package Epson offers, with everything he needs shipped together. "It really comes down to the AN2WA100 solution, with the short throw interactive display, the Epson software, and the partnerships with Chief and Da-Lite," he says. "It's an affordable whiteboard solution that's easy to install and gives us high definition images plus finger-touch or pen control. Those features set Epson apart and are what steered us away from other solutions."

"We work very hard to make the video conferencing experience seamless, so teachers can have casual conversations with students who may be taking classes from anywhere in the world," Robshaw adds. "For that to work, the technology must be as simple as possible, getting out of their way so they can teach. We've tried nearly every interactive solution. None are as user friendly as the Epson."

***"It's the best product we have found,
certainly ahead of the curve."***

—JEFFREY ROBSHAW, CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the individuals and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of Gateway Technical College. Individuals were not compensated for this article.

¹ Functionality may vary depending on hardware, application, and/or provider restrictions or limitations. Devices and cables not included.