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North Island College Innovation Garners International Attention

Scientists and post-secondary curriculum designers from all over North America have gathered at North Island College's Comox Valley campus to explore the use of the web for delivering university-level science courses.

As architects of the technology supporting the Remote Web-Based Science Laboratory (RWSL) project, having spent the past three years designing and building the prototypes, North Island College's own Ron Evans and Albert Balbon are front and centre at the conference, demonstrating the technology, including the purpose-built robotic arm, used to conduct laboratory experiments remotely.



Albert Balbon tells conference attendees about the Remote Web-based Science Laboratory project at North Island College.



NIC's Albert Balbon explains how technology he helped develop with Ron Evans could improve science education over the internet.

The RWSL project was awarded a \$750,000 grant from Next Generation Learning Challenges, to further develop and replicate delivery of science education remotely. Working as part of a consortium with BCCampus, the Colorado Community College System and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, North Island College's RWSL initiative was selected from a field of more than 600 pre-proposals and 50 finalists.

Partially funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, recognition in this form is high praise for NIC's Ron Evans and Albert Balbon. North Island College has been provided a grant and both are now working with their North American partners to make online science education a reality.

"The initial idea was to take science labs to students in remote locations," explains Ron Evans, and NIC science instructor formerly located in Bella Coola. "However, when we began building the technology, we soon realized that science education could be delivered in a way never before imagined – remotely through the internet – providing the flexibility necessary for those with families or other commitments and students with disabilities to complete a science degree."

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Albert Balbon, NIC's Supervisor of Distributed Learning, elaborates, "With the interest shown by our North American partners, and the funding we recently received, we are now starting to envision a RSWL network, where a student from Colorado or Montana may access their lectures from their local community college, but conduct their laboratories online using the equipment at North Island College."

"NIC has been a leading partner in this initiative, and we are excited to be hosting our colleagues from across North America," states NIC President Dr. Jan Lindsay. "North Island College has always been a leader in the delivery of distance education, necessitated by our geographic region, but this concept is so innovative and takes the delivery of science education to another level entirely."

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