

# Multi-point video conferences to use Internet2

BY SEAN SELMAN  
Reporter Staff

Faculty in the School of Medicine will put UAB's Internet2 connections to the test in a new project that involves video-conferencing technology.

Associate Professor Chris Lorish (Undergraduate Medical Education) aims to make three-way video-conferences more convenient for faculty in a project supported by the Southeastern Universities Research Association, Bolt, Baranek and Newman Technologies and GTE Internetworking.

Lorish will set up a multi-point video-conferencing system on a portable cart that faculty and staff in the School of Medicine can use in place of remote locations on campus. In coming weeks, the system will link people here with their counterparts in Huntsville and Tuscaloosa using faster connections provided by a server at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta and Internet2 connections.

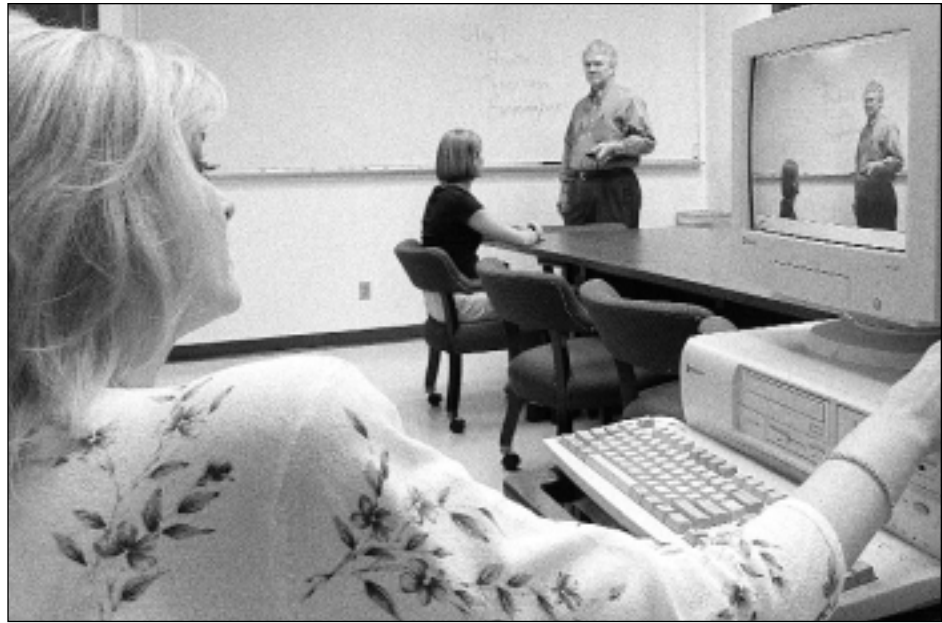
The project is part of the national Large-Scale Video Network Prototype (LSVNP) program that investigates model architectures for video services. It is part of the larger Video Development Initiative (ViDe), a multi-institutional program that promotes the use of digital video technology in higher education.

More than 60 institutions plan to conduct projects supported by ViDe. Among them are applications in marine sciences, veterinary medicine, speech pathology and audiology, training for K-12 teachers, architecture, higher-education outreach and technical assistance for the deaf, emergency telemedicine and earthquake research.

Senior Network Application Specialist Jill Gemmill (Telecommunications) urged Lorish to submit his project for inclusion in ViDe. She said it would help researchers answer a pressing question: Can multi-point video-conferencing be of any real use to them or their students?

"Is it reliable? How does it compare to face-to-face meetings or to telephone conferences? What is the learning curve?" Gemmill asked. "Lorish's project is designed to address these questions by involving real faculty in real work."

UAB faculty and staff have access to a well-established video-conferencing system. Although it is reliable, Lorish said



Mike Strawn

Assistant Professor Julie Walsh (Undergraduate Medical Education), foreground, watches Associate Professor Chris Lorish on a monitor during a recent test of new video-conferencing equipment.

the system can be inconvenient for faculty, who usually must go to different buildings in order to use it. That prevents many from using the system altogether, which can lead to a breakdown in communication on issues such as curriculum development.

Lorish will use three computers provided by Associate Dean Dennis Boulware (Medical Education) and video-conferencing equipment provided by Chair David Shealy (Physics) to assemble his project. He said a multi-point video-conference system could improve faculty communication and that students could use it for group projects in which they discuss clinical problems and case studies.

"I think UAB's participation in this certainly keeps us on the radar screen as far as Internet2 applications," Lorish said. "This will be used initially as part of the curriculum-revision process and faculty governance. Committees such as the clerkship director's committee, the medical-education clinicians, the deans and others could use the system to discuss curriculum, faculty issues, course-evaluation forms and other topics that require input from faculty and staff at all three campuses."

The project also could benefit students in the long run, many of whom have already expressed an interest in using the multi-point system.

"I think what you see with students is a higher technological sophistication than you do among the faculty. I could see students jumping on it and communicating with students at the other two campuses easily," Lorish said.

Gemmill said Lorish's project should prove to be an effective test of UAB's Internet2 capabilities.

"The three sites in the project - in Birmingham, Tuscaloosa and Huntsville - will connect using the Gulf Central GigaPop network, which is Alabama's Internet2 network," she said. "Although it is possible to do video-conferencing here at a very low quality, this particular project will connect sites at high resolutions of up to 1.5 megabits per second in each direction.

"Just a few years ago, that speed was equal to the Internet connection for all of UAB."

The larger LSVNP program will establish a test-bed for exploration of issues critical to the deployment of seamless, networked video at research universities throughout the country. Officials associated with the LSVNP project will use the data they collect to analyze video-traffic patterns.

The Internet2 consortium represents a partnership of more than 175 American universities that work in conjunction with industry, government and international partners. Internet2 members, including UAB, develop and deploy advanced network applications and technologies for research and higher education.

Officials with the Internet2 consortium said its purpose is to recreate the partnership of academia, industry and government that helped foster today's Internet in its infancy. A primary goal of Internet2 is to deploy and demonstrate advanced networking capabilities that will make their way into the global commodity Internet.

## Telephone project winding up

During the past two and a half years the communications department has been working with various departments throughout the hospital and campus in an effort to upgrade older telephone equipment to the new Meridian digital telephones. This process has included the migration of more than 4,000 instruments at this time, lowering departmen-

tal costs and standardizing systems.

Any department that has not been contacted about the upgrade should have its telephone coordinator contact Dee Ann Graubart, 934-0503, or fax a request to 975-9000.

To obtain free installation for upgrading, the request must be received no later than April 30.