

IMPACT



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North Idaho Internet Education Program Brings Technology to Rural Communities

The Situation

People in rural communities have limited access to computer and Internet training opportunities. Those who have access to computer and the Internet often lack the skills to utilize the technology. Teachers, parents, business professionals, retirees, and others want to know how to use computers and the Internet more effectively.

Our Response

In 2001, Verizon Foundation awarded a grant to University of Idaho Extension to provide Internet Education in Kootenai, Bonner, and Boundary counties. The scope of the grant was expanded in 2002 to include Benewah County.

Extension Educators utilized the Internet Masters curriculum, developed by North Dakota State University, as a basis to develop a series of Internet workshops. The Internet Education Series comprised the following topics:

Session 1—“*Basic Internet.*” Participants explored topics such as how to get online (modems, ISPs), basic Internet searches, viruses, and file directories.

Session 2—“*Intermediate Internet.*” Participants discussed types and uses of various search engines, copyright issues, security, cookies, chatrooms, list serves, and buying online.

Session 3—“*Email Basics.*” Instructors introduced the participants to various email topics including sending/receiving email, sending/opening

Photo by Valdasue Steele



Mobile lab technology makes an Internet class possible in St. Maries, Benewah County.

attachments, digital cameras, scanners, viruses, list serves, and email etiquette.

Session 4—“*Introduction to Web Page Design.*” This workshop was delivered via compressed video and focused on three aspects of web page development: information, design, and structure.

In order to provide consistent technology to the program participants matching funds from the University of Idaho were used to purchase six laptop computers to create a networked mobile computer

lab. The mobile computer lab enabled all participants to “surf” the net simultaneously in a facility that had only one outside phone line available.

Program Outcomes

Seventy-one participants attended the workshops. In each class, participants were asked to compare their knowledge on specific topics before and after attending the class. All participants in each class indicated increased knowledge as a result of the instruction they received. Specifically, participants reported increased knowledge in selecting an Internet service provider, searching the Internet, copyright issues, cookies, buying online, emailing including attachments and photos, and web page development. Participants in all the workshops indicated that they would enroll in additional classes on Internet and computer related topics.

Bonner County focused their series of classes around web page design. The target audience for this program was at-risk youth. Students applied their knowledge in a positive way by creating a brochure style website for Habitat for Humanity, a non-profit group www.sandpoint.org/idahopanhandlehfh. After completing the class, 100% of the participants rated the workshop content and format as excellent. Students expressed interest in more classes; particularly those that involve job related skills such as web page design. Students were asked to compare their knowledge of web page design before and after taking the class series. All the students reported that before taking the class they had little or no knowledge of covered areas. After taking the class, they reported moderate to high skill and knowledge levels.

In response to feedback from the Internet Education Series, the Benewah County UI faculty offered two additional classes on basic computer skills.

The Future

In the future, the mobile lab will be made available to any county extension office in District 1 for teaching computer/Internet related workshops.

For More Information

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