

Smart Spaces

NEC Touchscreen Displays Enhance Learning and Collaboration at Toronto College

The Challenge:

- Add technology to a campus library's group collaboration spaces to align with Seneca's digital learning goals.

Solution:

- Two [NEC Display Solutions 65-inch E651-T interactive touchscreen displays](#).

Result:

- Popular learning spaces that allow students to connect online, work collaboratively on group projects, and interact with a screen hands-on.



Higher education facilities know that learning doesn't just happen in the classroom; it happens before and after school, in small study groups or alone, in dorms, homes, libraries and coffee shops. Every student has different preferences for how to learn, and a college's job is to give them the tools they need to succeed – including collaboration technologies that facilitate group learning.

With several principles in place to guide its digital learning strategy, Seneca in Ontario has implemented technology all over its multiple campuses – yet the Newnham library's two group study spaces lacked anything to support collaboration beyond a whiteboard. It was time for an upgrade.

The Background

[Seneca](#) is one of the largest of Ontario's 24 colleges, with several campuses in Toronto, York Region and Peterborough, catering to all types of academic and experiential learning. Four of its campuses offer libraries.

Seneca's Newnham Campus library manages 692,941 student, faculty, staff and community users annually. Its group study spaces accommodate 26,385 visitors each year.

"The library is designed specifically to support student learning, and students identify it as a place that is dedicated and conducive to learning, studying and collaborating – not just a place to go for books and resources," said Michelle Gravelle, Manager, Library User Services at Seneca's Library Resource Centre.

The library offers three types of study spaces: silent, quiet and collaborative. Students can reserve the collaborative spaces for specific times and dates to work on group assignments or use for informal study groups.

There are nine bookable collaboration rooms at Newnham Campus. Seven rooms have standard monitors, so students can plug their own laptops into the screens, which were installed when campus ITS moved to a BYOD policy. Until recently, the other two spaces – the ones situated within the library itself, unlike the other seven in the campus Learning Commons – lacked technology, offering students only whiteboards for their collaborative work. But that was not in line with Seneca's digital learning goals.

A Focus on Digital Learning

In 2018, Seneca created a Digital Learning Strategy for the coming three years. Derived from the University of South Australia's paper "Developing a Digital Learning Strategy," Seneca's background focuses on designing for student engagement, designing for flexibility, designing for assessment, and designing for employability and pathways to other credentials.

The Digital Learning Strategy's four goals are to

- Ensure that the technological infrastructure at Seneca is adaptive, robust, sustainable and current
- Create high-quality, technology-enabled experiences that will actively engage students and enhance their learning
- Provide students with a variety of flexible and inclusive ways to learn
- Provide students with a variety of opportunities to enrich their experiences both in and out of the classroom

"One of our key initiatives over the past couple of years has been improving student experience to boost engagement," added Alvin Shum, Director, Service Delivery, ITS at Seneca.

To align the Newnham Campus library's two group learning spaces with these goals, Seneca installed two [NEC Display Solutions 65-inch E651-T interactive touchscreen displays](#).

"We have a great partnership with NEC," Shum said. "They've been providing us with AV technology such as projectors and displays for years."

The touchscreen aspect was especially important, Gravelle added.

"The collaborative aspect means students will be able to access and work on a document or group project together in a room at the same time, which will be an enhancement," she said. "It's inspiring to see students work in a group like that."

Shum agreed that the touchscreens were a major step forward.

"Other displays around campus aren't touch-enabled, and incorporating them was part of the effort to take learning to the next level," he said. "Students can use their finger or the stylus that comes with the screen to manipulate data and mark up projects in a collaborative setting, versus students trying to email each other copies with no version control."

The Upgraded Rooms

The new touchscreen displays were installed in August 2018 and have proved highly popular, with hundreds of bookings in the first month of the school year. The monitors allow students to connect online, work collaboratively on group projects and interact with the screen.

"These rooms are in high demand," Shum said. "You see the touchscreen being plugged into one laptop, with four or five students gathered around the screen, engaged in project and school work. We hope this leads to more student success, and we believe this kind of digital learning is one way we will move forward and differentiate ourselves from other postsecondary institutions."

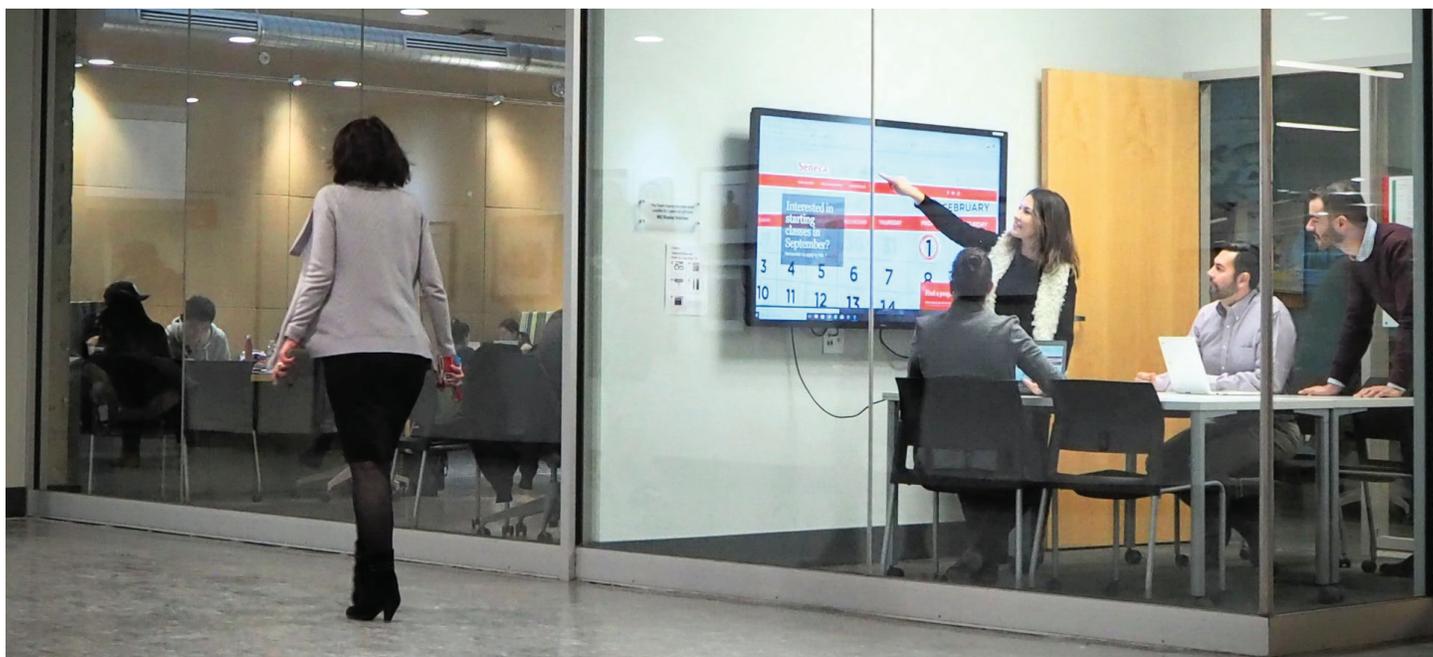
Student feedback has been highly positive as well. For instance, a group of five Bachelor of Early Childhood Education students booked the same room three days in a row for their group collaboration project.

"The screens are great! My program is mainly group projects, so [they] work well for collaboration, sharing articles and making sure the group is all on the same page," said a student from a group of International Business Management.

Gravelle believes the touchscreens will lend themselves nicely to the ways the students previously used the rooms.

"I used to see a group of engineering or accounting students who would use the glass windows looking out onto the corridor to write mathematical formulas," Gravelle said. "Now I see students using the touchscreen and stylus in a similar fashion."

With Seneca's two newest buildings – Magna Hall at King Campus, which opened in the fall of 2018, and the Centre for Innovation Technology and Entrepreneurship (CITE), which opened in January at Newnham Campus – there are many opportunities for additional technology enhancements.



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