

Using Skype™ to support the Idaho Master Gardener program in Boundary County

AT A GLANCE

An online presentation including a visual of the presenter and slides was an effective way to teach portions of the Idaho Master Gardener training program in Boundary County.

The Situation

Boundary County has a population of about 10,850. With its lower population and its location at the most northern end of the state, it can sometimes be difficult to find qualified instructors for the Idaho Master Gardener training. The training program is always held during the wintertime which can also make it difficult for even regionally located speakers to travel.

In the past we have tried using Adobe Connect with the wireless internet, but lost the connection a couple times during the presentation. We have also used the phone line with a conference phone in the classroom. This was successful, but some students wished they could see the presenter.

Our Response

This year we decided to try using Skype™ so the students could see the presenter. The PowerPoint slides were sent to the facilitator ahead of time. The presenter would tell the facilitator when to advance. There were two computers and two projectors used in the classroom. One for the Skype screen and one for the slides. The Skype™ computer was connected to the internet using a hard line rather than using the wireless.

This technique was used with Tony McCammon, Extension Educator in Twin Falls County to teach the fruit tree portion of the Idaho Master Gardener.



The presentation involved running two projectors and computers; one for the presenter's image and one for the slides.

Program Outcomes

A survey was conducted of the Master Gardener trainees after the lecture to learn their opinion of the Skype™ class. Six questions were rated on the scale where 5=strongly agrees, 4=agrees, 3=neutral, 2=disagrees, and 1=strongly disagrees.

The majority of the class either strongly agreed or agreed that the internet learning format of Skype with local PowerPoint presentation was an effective method of learning about the topic (4.75). The class also agreed that they were comfortable learning using the internet learning format (4.77). Almost everyone strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the quality of the presentation (4.91). This was also noted in the additional comments that were made:

- He was very knowledgeable on the subject and did a great job considering the circumstances.

- Excellent instructor.
- Fantastic presentation by Tony McCammon.

The majority of the class agreed that they were satisfied with their level of interaction with the presenter, but there was one student that was neutral on this topic (4.58). When asked if being able to see the presenter in person would have added value to the presentation there were mixed replies (3.81). Seven students either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, three were neutral, and one disagreed. Half of the class disagreed or strongly disagreed that internet learning would make in-person educational events unnecessary (2.66) although there were two students that was in strong agreement with this statement.

Overall, the class using Skype™ and a PowerPoint presentation was very successful. Other additional comments included:

- Awesome class via Skype.
- Just as effective.
- Very enjoyable, interaction worked well.

There was one negative comment that stated “Needed a break sooner! If he had been here, he might have seen participant discomfort signs and symptoms.” The internet presentations via Skype™ may not be perfect, but they do offer a cost effective way to offer at least some of the Idaho Master Gardener topics in more rural areas of the state. They also allow the coordinator to draw from very knowledgeable presenters that would not otherwise be able to travel for the class.

The Future

The Skype™ and local PowerPoint combination will continue to be explored for both Idaho Master Gardener trainings and other extension programs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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