Videoconferencing

There are some technical limitation when using videoconferencing for teaching that will enhance the experience for students.

When connecting another teaching space by videoconferencing, it is just as important the far side students are engaged as the students in the room, perhaps more so. Students in a room receiving videoconferencing can feel very disconnected and will experience a type of inequity if left out and not engaged.

There are some simple steps to ensure the students at the rooms without the lecturer are more engaged.
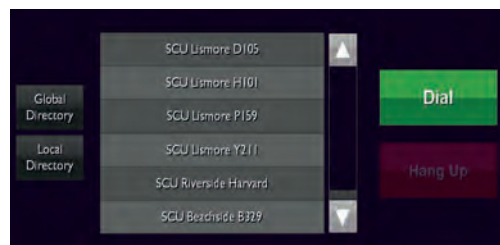
1. Make sure that the videoconferencing camera is looked at as frequently, this will be perceived at the other end, of having the lecturer making eye contact to all attendees.

2. Wherever possible, ask for the far end microphone to be left un-muted, in order for the students at the far side be able to interact. Ensure this happens by asking questions to the students at the far side specifically, and include them in any group or classroom discussions.

3. A well used technique is to learn the students names, and use this when addressing them, it makes the engagement more personal, and will encourage a communications, simply asking, "does anyone on the videoconference have something to say" will be met with silence.

4. Ensure you are paying attention to the video of the far side, as much as practical. There is nothing more disengaging than to have students raise their arms to ask questions and be ignored. A useful technique is to ask the students in the room to let you know if anyone at the far side would like to talk.

Making a call

There are two main ways to call using videoconferencing, and it is very similar to using phones, by either direct dialling another videoconference room, or by using a bridge.

At Southern Cross University, we use a bridging system called an 'MCU' to connect our videoconference rooms. The MCU (Multipoint Control Unit), is a bridge that connects all the videoconference rooms together, much like a bridge telephone conference.

All videoconferencing rooms have address books that have entries for the MCU and the ability to input addresses manually, to connect to rooms directly (non MCU) or to an outside (not Southern Cross University) Videoconference room.

Using the camera control

Most videoconference rooms are equipped with two camera's in order to change the video of the lectern to the audience. This is useful when the room is receiving the lecture from the far side, the audience camera is selected in order that the lecturer can see their students.

All Videoconference rooms are equipped with camera control, and the touch panel interface usually has a camera control page, that provides access to functions such as selecting the lectern or audience camera, plus pan, tilt and zoom.

There are also a number of presets, 1 to 8, with the first three programmed on three positions of the lectern, Zoomed close up, medium and far zoom out.

Selfview, changes the video from the participants at the far side, to the local room video (depending on the lectern or audience camera selected).

Note: It is also possible to change the position of the camera at the far end.

Once again we see that many interface designs provide very similar control.