



October 24, 2001

To: Ms. Carol Kostyniak, WNYPRI Chairperson  
Subject: WNY Partnership for Regional Internetworking Support

Dear Carol,

The University at Buffalo has been supporting instruction via distance learning at an institutional level since 1996. The Schools of Nursing, Engineering, Informatics and Graduate School of Education were our earliest adopters of distance learning course delivery, however, every school within the University has now realized benefits via interactive videoconferencing and distance learning.

The experimental phase of distance learning is fading as new teaching tools are enthusiastically embraced. On a national level, traditional students no longer make up the majority of people seeking higher education, thus it is clear that degree-based programs will be the future focus of our distance learning efforts.

This direction requires two key elements: strong program content and technology infrastructure. UB faculty and professional staff offer excellent academic programs and student support, but are continually challenged by delivery infrastructure that is not interconnected with regional, national or international sites. Our operation is faced with turning students away every semester because we "can't get there from here" in a virtual environment. The WNY PRI offers an effective and efficient solution through cost sharing of hardware and expertise that will benefit all students in the region – regardless of institutional affiliation.

Perhaps the most important asset of the WNY PRI is the collective "brain trust" and experience the partnership offers. This group of collaborators has already fostered regional cooperation through research, telemedicine and educational applications as well as international demonstration projects. The recent terrorist attacks have illustrated how videoconferencing can quickly disseminate critical information and realize significant savings in time and travel.

The University has committed telecommunications space and access to infrastructure as well as technical expertise. More specifically, the UB Distance Learning & Videoconference Operations unit will continue to offer classrooms and administrative expertise to the partnership. We enthusiastically support the addition of a shared multipoint control unit that will seamlessly connect our networks on a "local to global" level.

Sincerely,

Lisa Stephens  
Associate Director, Distance Learning & Videoconference Operations