

TECHNOLOGY UPGRADES KEEP COMM DEPT. CURRENT & COMPETITIVE

by John Jackson

College communication departments have the difficult task of making continual technology upgrades to stay current and competitive, and the department at Manhattan College is no stranger to this.

The COMM Department has managed this well in the past. In 2016, the department's television studio was renovated to include 4K equipment and processing, making Manhattan College the first college in the New York metropolitan area to have a 4K television facility. Recently, the department purchased LED lights for the studio, new computers with 27-inch curved HD monitors for the Avid editing lab, and a sports remote production trailer for the department's newest concentration, Sports Media Production.

Each academic year, the COMM Department is granted a budget to maintain and upgrade its facilities and equipment, and to try to stay as state-of-the-art as possible. With the 2017-2018 budget, the department addressed lighting in the Sumner Redstone Television Production Center. When the studio had been built a decade ago, it utilized a traditional halogen incandescent lighting system. Those lights were kept until the department replaced them in the Spring 2018 semester with more energy-efficient and versatile LED lights.

"We were able to replace [the old lights] with new energy-efficient LED instruments," said associate professor Michael Grabowski. "They're a little bit lighter. They're certainly much more energy efficient, so that means they're also cooler. So there's less air conditioning needed in the studio. There's also less electricity needed to power them so we're saving money that way. They're also safer to handle. They don't get as hot, so students can touch them without burning their hands."

A DMX-style lighting dimmer board/console was installed along with the LED lights. The new dimmer board is used to dial in color temperature and brightness of the lamps, giving students experience with lighting technology they are likely to encounter in professional television internships and jobs.

"We see that television studios in the city are moving to more daylight-balanced studios with LED instruments, and so we're able to create that same effect here in our studio," said Grabowski. "Thus, students, when they go do an internship or start working in the city, will see the same lighting instruments they're used to in our studio."

To kick off the current 2018-2019 academic year, the department spent their budget to upgrade the Avid editing lab, which they do on a five-year cycle. (The College's ITS Department replaces computers on a three-year cycle.) They managed to purchase 20 new computers, each accompanied by a 27-inch curved HD monitor. These Avid-certified machines process information faster and have larger screens, so that students have more room to work when editing with Avid.

"Computers, as [they get] older, they get slower, they get bogged down, there are problems," said Bob Coleman, the department's Coordinator of Media Technology. "So we really want to keep everything state-of-the-art. We don't want our students coming here and working on equipment that's older than five years. We think it's important to have state-of-the-art technology here and we do."

The computer at the teacher's station was also upgraded with two screens, giving ample space for editing. This space will also function as a finishing station for students.

By the start of the 2019 Spring Semester, the department will be bringing aboard another major technological investment: a mobile production unit, or "MPU." The MPU will be used by students enrolled this Spring in the new "Sports Media Production" course, taught by Grabowski.

Next year, the department hopes to replace the iMAC computers in the Multimedia Lab. Coleman is already looking into computers with 27-inch, high resolution, retina-display screens. In the meantime, Grabowski is interested in securing more camera-support features and investing in virtual reality equipment. •