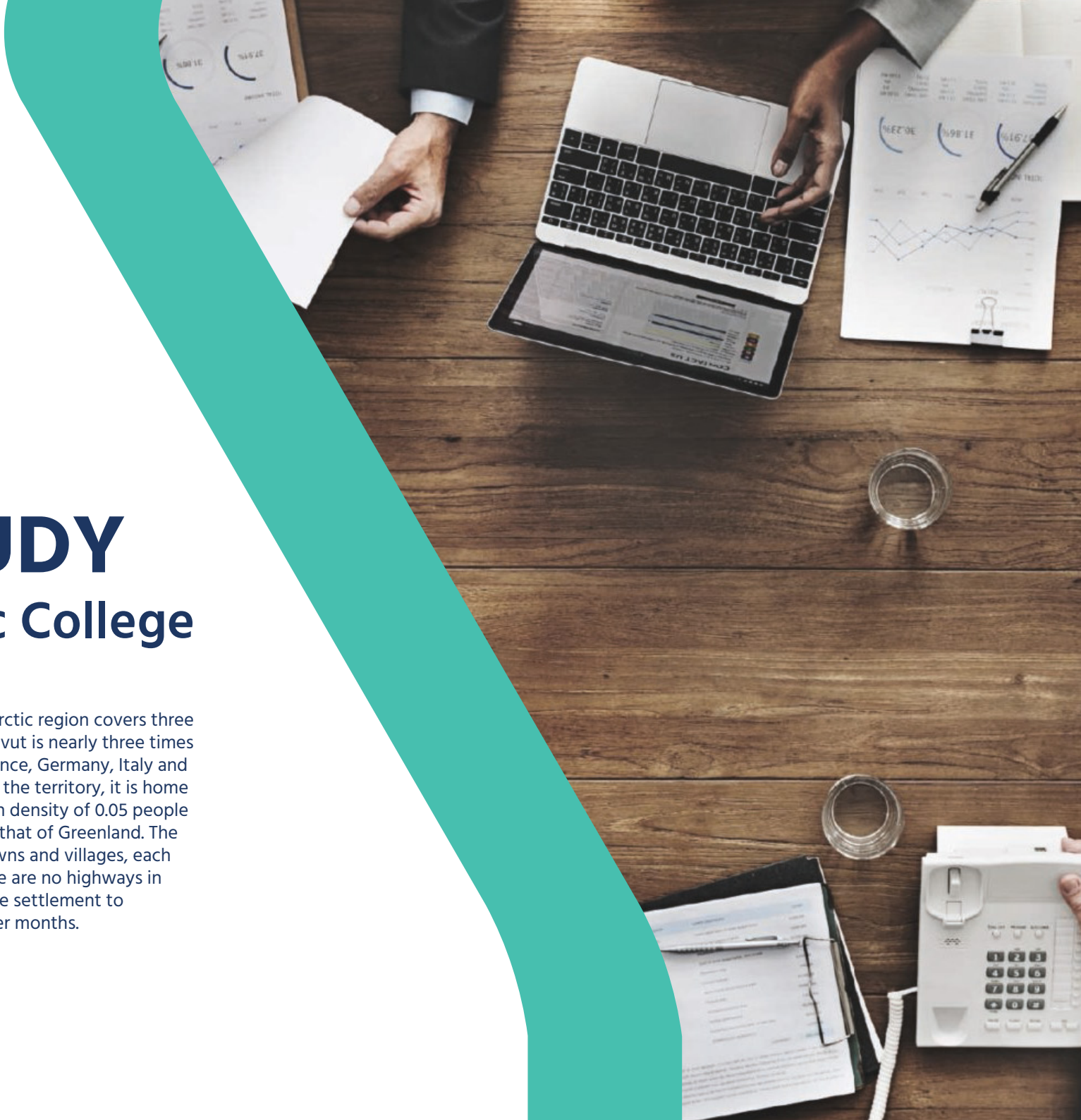




CASE STUDY

Nunavut Arctic College

Nunavut is Canada's largest territory. The arctic region covers three time zones and 787,000 square miles. Nunavut is nearly three times the size of Texas. It is larger than Spain, France, Germany, Italy and England combined. Yet, despite the size of the territory, it is home to just 37,000 people. Nunavut's population density of 0.05 people per square mile is substantially lower than that of Greenland. The population lives in a scattering of small towns and villages, each separated by miles of treeless tundra. There are no highways in Nunavut. There is no way to travel from one settlement to another, except by air, or by boat in warmer months.



THE CHALLENGE

Connecting these communities is an ongoing challenge for the agencies and businesses that operate in Nunavut. It is a particular obstacle for Nunavut Arctic College (NAC), a public body tasked with providing equal opportunity access to higher education across the territory. The NAC maintains facilities in each of Nunavut's 25 named communities, ranging in size from a single classroom in hamlets like Grise Fiord (pop. 129) to full campuses in the towns of Rankin Inlet and Cambridge Bay. The main campus is located in Iqaluit, the territory's capital and only city, with a population of about 7,500.

Nic Polito, manager of distance education at NAC, believes online education is the most efficient way to provide learning to this remotest part of Canada.

"It's important we can provide connected learning and provide it well, because of the isolated nature of our 25 communities. We're not connected by road. They are all fly-in communities and they are definitely the most expensive places to fly out of in Canada. So, when you're faced with that kind of geographical barrier, finding education outside of your community is prohibitively expensive," said Polito.

THE SOLUTION

"The natural solution is having access to education online."

NAC makes use of a Remote Learner (now a Learning Pool company) designed solution to offer online access to the college's 1,000 students. With this Digital Learning Environment (DLE), students in even the smallest communities can access training without the need to travel to a larger campus.

However, physical separation is just the most obvious challenge the college faces. The NAC also struggles with a lack of local digital literacy, thanks in part to the expense of shipping electronics to small communities. And, while the federal government has heavily subsidized satellite Internet in the territory, connectivity still lags behind the more populated areas of southern Canada. Nunavut also has the lowest adult literacy rate in Canada and online content in the native Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun languages is scanty, presenting an additional barrier to engagement.



“A significant number of our learners have not had the opportunity to develop digital literacy at a level that lets them engage with even a well-developed online course,” said Polito. “Even email can be a challenge.”

When Polito started working at the NAC the college’s DLE was functional, but previously developed courses had been shelved and there were no enrolled students. Updates were rare and attempts to improve the interface or user experience had fallen behind. Given the existing lack of digital literacy, this further complicated access issues for both students and instructors. Polito contacted Learning Pool for help in making the college’s DLE more accessible and intuitive. He worked with Remote Learner’s developers and designers to significantly update the site and content presentation.

THE RESPONSE

“You’ve helped us with branding and set up, uploading course templates and providing overviews of how to use them.

At a fundamental level – and I know the distance learning staff feel the same way – Learning Pool’s just there for us. I know we can reach out at any time and get a response right away. That kind of support is extremely important.”

Nic Polito

Manager of Distance Education

RESULTS

“When I look at what we had when we first started compared to what I have now – thanks to Learning Pool – they are light years apart. Now we have a current version of Moodle and (our staff) are very engaged in the process of creating new courses and upgrading old courses to take advantage of all the updates,” said Polito.

The update has not only improved the look and function of the site, it has also helped students and teachers familiarize themselves with online navigation using a modern, intuitive user interface. As a result, there has been an increase in the number of active students, with four active courses, and six more under development. *“We are seeing what we can add to the program at the entry-level to build up their digital skills and build up their ability to be independent in a digital space,”* he said.

The number of faculty engaged with the DLE has more than doubled, and teachers now have a greater understanding of course creation and site use. The key to improving their online skills is provided by Learning Pool’s Learning Spaces training team, and by regular webinars that demonstrate DLE administration with a live instructor. Polito said these resources have been invaluable for NAC faculty and administrators. He also credited Learning Pool’s support team with consistently going above and beyond to solve problems.





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