

HYBRID LEARNING SUCCESS

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE INCARNATE WORD

The University of the Incarnate Word (UIW) is the largest Catholic university in Texas and no stranger to innovation. Since the pandemic forced a nationwide shift in education environments in 2020, UIW has instituted a revolutionary hybrid academic approach, with Yamaha RM-CG ceiling microphones playing a key role.



ALL PHOTOS CREDIT: ADELA GOTT

Founded in 1881, the university was the first institution to offer higher education for women in the centre and south of Texas and has a reputation for pioneering new programs. **Cardinal Flex - the university's hybrid academic program - features both synchronous and asynchronous classes, delivering an equally interactive educational experience to students, whether in-person or remote.**

THE CHALLENGE

Some variations on the hybrid model existed throughout campus before the Cardinal Flex program was officially launched. However, the experience fell short of UIW's high standards. "We were doing it, but it wasn't the quality we needed it to be," says Dr Denise Staudt, the university's Dean of Education.



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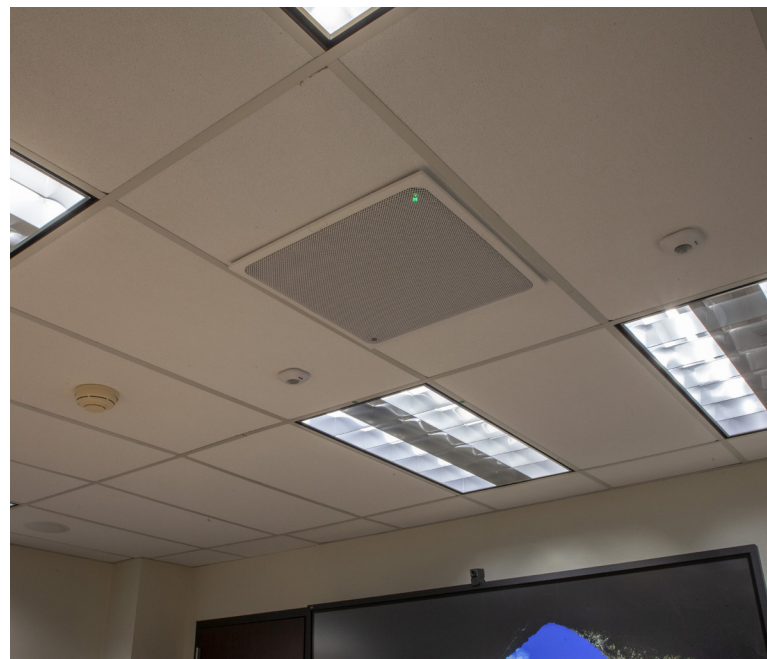
A consultant had been brought in to help the faculty redesign courses to perform well within the hybrid model, but a major AV technology upgrade was also necessary for a successful rollout. Though classrooms were already outfitted with webcams for teaching, the approach to audio was un-coordinated, some featuring ceiling-hung microphones, while others used tabletop models.

“There was always an issue,” says Kathleen Bottaro, Assistant Provost, Office of Teaching, Learning and Technology at UIW. “Though remote students could usually see and hear the teaching staff, they couldn’t see or hear their classmates.”

Of course, with sound no news is good news. When an audio system is working as it should, it goes unnoticed, leaving students and faculty members free to focus on the most important thing - education. As Media Services Manager, Rodney Evans, says, “We wanted a microphone solution that would capture speech clearly in large spaces with minimal equipment. To do that, we needed a highly reliable microphone with a Dante interface, which would effortlessly marry into our AV control systems.

THE SOLUTION

The UIW staff consulted long-trusted systems integrator AVSANT of Richardson, Texas, who suggested installing Yamaha’s RM-CG ceiling microphone in some of the university’s classrooms and conference rooms, each classroom seating up to 25 people and conference rooms around 15.



Certified for Zoom and Microsoft Teams, the Dante-enabled RM-CG ceiling microphone features four dynamic beams for optimal room coverage and is packed with Yamaha audio technologies, including Human Voice Activity Detection, Auto Gain Control, Dereverberation and Noise Cancellation. And with its low profile aesthetics, it's a visually unobtrusive addition to the ceiling of any indoor space.

"The RM-CG microphone delivered the audio solution we needed, with a concealable, aesthetically-pleasing look for our learning spaces," says Rodney Evans.

While students immediately said they were pleased with the audio quality of the new hybrid systems, it was also important that staff were also on board. Because they are also working with interactive displays and cameras, the RM-CG's simplicity and functionality meant there was no concern about additional workload. Once a class begins, staff initiate the 'virtual' classroom, either

via an in-room laptop or by using their own device. It is so simple and fast that they have needed no encouragement to use the RM-CG microphones. Indeed, responses were so positive that additional systems with RM-CGs were quickly specified.

"Yamaha's microphones have been the least problematic piece of the whole puzzle," says Kathleen Bottaro. "You have to learn how to use the cameras, but there's no learning curve with the microphones."

Even so, training on the updated technology was made available over the summer, so staff could get accustomed to using the new technology before the first day of school. Kathleen's team was also available on the first day of school, ready to provide IT support if needed.

"We have not had any trouble in the rooms from the start," said Dr. Denise Staudt. "The faculty is very pleased with the equipment and the sound. It's allowing us to go even further than we thought we could."





David Hoyle, VP Account Management at AVSANT, says, “The ease of installation, with the complete Ethernet connectivity and automatic audio tuning, really helped to simplify my team’s execution of the project installations at UIW. We know that with Yamaha quality, every product will be installed and work without failure the first time, every time.

“The Yamaha RM-CG is now our ‘go-to’ solution for applications requiring ceiling grid microphones.”

Rob Tellone, President of AVSANT, adds, “We have appreciated the opportunity to work for many years with the great team at UIW - led by its CIO, Neil Schroeder, and Kathleen Bottaro - and we know that we must perform 100% on every project. Using Yamaha’s RM-CG ceiling microphone allows us to do that and provide perfect quality for their classroom and conference room audio.”

“The quality of the RM-CG microphone allows

me to offer the flexibility of hybrid options, without any concern for audio quality,” says Dr. Norman St. Clair, Director of Graduate and Doctoral Studies at UIW. “I can confidently offer these options and students appreciate their reliability and flexibility. Based on their feedback, it been a smooth experience without any disruption at all when interacting with each other.”

