Remote Cultural Exchange Happens in Real Time

BY JESSICA BROWN '14

A Smith classroom that's well-furnished with computers and with students sitting at long tables with laptops, a world away from the usual setting for a French class. In Paris, James Beugnet's Engish class is about to start. "It's the very first [dialogue] session, my students are being introduced to each other, and they have to learn to say hello, goodbye, and ask for a pen."

But how can students communicate effectively when they are thousands of miles apart? One way is through the use of webcam technology, which allows students to see each other in real time.

"It's a great way to focus on the French language," Beugnet explains. "They can communicate with each other in real time, which is very important for learning a new language."

The exchange program between Smith and the University of Lille in France began last year and has been a huge success. Students from both institutions have been able to communicate effectively through the use of webcams, which has helped them to learn more about each other's cultures and to improve their language skills.

"It's been a wonderful opportunity for Smith students," Beugnet says. "They get to see what life is like in France and they get to practice their French."

The exchange program has also been beneficial for the University of Lille students, who have been able to learn more about American culture and to improve their English skills.

"It's a great way to learn a new language and to see how different cultures learn," one French student says. "I've learned a lot about American culture and I've had a great time communicating with my Smith counterparts."

Overall, the exchange program has been a huge success, and both institutions are looking forward to continuing it in the future.

"We're hoping to expand the program to include more courses and more students," Beugnet says. "It's been a great way to learn and to make new friends."