Paris Institute of Political Studies Uses Zoom to Transition to Remote Learning & Maintain Community During COVID-19

Founded in 1872 by Emile Boutmy, the Paris Institute of Political Studies (Sciences Po) has always instructed students with one goal in mind: to better understand the world in order to change it for the better. With a large international student body, a diverse curriculum, and a dedication to innovation in education and research, Sciences Po has helped generations of students and researchers make a positive impact on the world.

Sciences Po provides a number of academic opportunities for its 14,000 students, including doctoral programs at its seven graduate schools, 15 executive master’s programs, and the opportunity to study at its numerous multicultural campuses. As part of its dedication to international collaboration, the university also offers dual bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees with international partners such as Columbia University, the London School of Economics, and Peking University.

Challenge
As a university with a large number of international students, Sciences Po needed a communications solution that allowed for frictionless and clear global communication. However, the organization also needed a solution that could leverage the technology they had on hand to avoid re-investing in audio and video conferencing equipment.

“Last year, we started doing some testing around our video conferencing systems because we wanted to improve our admissions process,” said Jean-Pierre Berthet, Chief Digital Officer at Sciences Po. “We needed to have an admissions process that could work at a distance because we have so many students from around the globe. We were using Cisco at first, but we needed a new video solution that could integrate with the SIP/H.323 technology that we already have on campus.”

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- Jean-Pierre Berthet
Chief Digital Officer at Sciences Po
As COVID-19 began spreading across the globe in early 2020, Sciences Po needed a solution they could deploy quickly and that students and professors could quickly adopt.

“A user-friendly interface was very important because we knew we needed to train more than 4,000 teachers and our students,” Berthet said.

Solution

“When we realized this change to remote learning was coming, we went to the ISE exhibition in Europe in February, which many audio-visual equipment manufacturers attended,” Berthet said. “Many of the large manufacturers like Logitech, Bose, Kramer, and Sony were presenting their new equipment, and all of it was compatible with Zoom. That’s when we said, ‘OK, I think our search is over.’

Zoom’s feature set, cost, flexibility, and reliability in a wide range of environments was exactly what Sciences Po needed to accomplish its global communication goals.

“The pricing between video conferencing solutions was huge. We could outfit 10 classrooms with Zoom for the price of one with our old video conferencing solution,” Berthet said. “The audio is very clear with Zoom, even in low-bandwidth environments. Teachers can also record their meetings with Zoom, which is important for our student body because if they live in Australia or some other location, they can’t stay up all night to attend a lecture at noon in Paris.”

Results

Sciences Po quickly implemented Zoom across the organization, and quickly moved teachers and students onto the platform.

“We focused on getting our staff and teachers trained on the platform first. We had about 4,000 teachers and staff to train, and with some intensive training courses, we were able to train most of them in about a week,” Berthet said. “We brought the students on two days later, and with the Zoom management portal, it’s very easy to manage all of their accounts.”

With Zoom, faculty and staff at Sciences Po could continue providing online education to their students, and they also found other ways to continue university life in a digital space.

“We are using the platform for online learning and courses, but we’re also using it to maintain our connection with the community,” Berthet said. “Every year we host over 600 debates that are open to the public on campus. Before the pandemic, we were hosting between one and three debates a day. With Zoom Video Webinars, we can continue to host these debates online and keep them open to the public. We also gave our students the ability to use their Zoom accounts for personal communication, so they can stay in touch with their families and friends.”

As Sciences Po continues to expand its use of Zoom, Berthet plans on integrating the university’s technology stack with Zoom to create a more seamless user experience.

“Right now our focus is getting the tools we have out to teachers and ensuring that they are comfortable with them,” Berthet said. “When our teachers know how to use them effectively, we’ll integrate those tools with Zoom to give them additional functionality.”

Zoom helps businesses and organizations bring their teams together in a frictionless cloud environment to get more done. Our easy, reliable, video-first unified communications platform for video, voice, content sharing, and chat runs across mobile devices, desktops, telephones, and room systems. Founded in 2011, Zoom is a publicly traded company on Nasdaq (ticker: ZM) and headquartered in San Jose, California.

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