



CASE STUDY

Who:

A public college located in southwestern Ontario, Canada, St. Clair is home to over 13,000 students

Situation:

Access to remote Mac desktops became a necessity as COVID-19 prevented students from using the onsite campus lab

Solution:

Thirty dedicated, cloud-hosted MacStadium Mac minis to enable course instruction on Xcode and Swift

Impact:

Students were able to complete class exercises and coursework while staying safely at home during the pandemic

“The machines were very helpful for our students, and they worked perfectly.”



www.stclaircollege.ca



St. Clair College: Remote Learning During COVID

About St. Clair College

Established in 1966, the St. Clair College of Applied Arts and Technology is located in Ontario, Canada. St. Clair College's main Windsor campus has over 6,000 students studying in over 90 programs in health sciences, community studies, engineering technology, and skilled trades, business, and IT. With additional campuses in Ontario, including the St. Clair College Centre for the Arts and the Skilled Trades Regional Training Center, St. Clair College offers both a two-year diploma and a three-year advanced diploma to its students.



Before MacStadium

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, during St. Clair College's spring semester break, the college decided to move to full online course instruction for the remainder of the 2020 spring semester. This presented a unique challenge for Professor Darren Takaki, as his classes required students to receive instruction and complete assignments in St. Clair College's Mac computer labs. Therefore, Takaki had one week before the break ended to find a new solution that would enable his students to keep working on coursework and studying safely from home.

Although Takaki's students initially had the option to sign up for time slots to continue to use the on-campus Mac labs, the demands of maintaining social distancing via scheduling were too cumbersome and unwieldy to manage. St. Clair College's Mac labs house the equipment needed for students learning Apple and iOS development, in addition to providing resources for students studying both UI and Android development. With approximately 90 available machines for students to use, replicating the experience of working in the labs but with an online solution was important for Takaki.

What Takaki really wanted was an easy-to-manage, cost-effective solution that enabled his students to continue their coursework in development from home without sacrificing the reliability and performance afforded by the equipment in the on-campus labs. To complete projects, students would need access to Xcode and Swift in a Mac environment, as they learned how to build small apps, and how to develop the functionality that included putting pins on a map, building a database, connecting to an API, database storage, and more. Takaki needed a solution that was easy for him to set up, manage and maintain remotely, so he could continue to focus on teaching and not on system management.

Accessing Macs in the Cloud

Alongside a few of his students, Takaki researched and participated in several trials to find the right fit for his students and his classes.

He came across MacStadium online and learned more about MacStadium's bare metal cloud solutions. Thanks to several YouTube videos, tutorials, guidance from Code with Chris, and MacStadium's documentation, Takaki and his students were attracted to the reported ease of use and positive experiences from others when working with MacStadium.

Together, Takaki and MacStadium decided that access to 30 bare metal Mac minis with remote desktop access would provide the best solution to enable Takaki's students to continue their online learning and coursework. Students had access to these dedicated Mac minis, each utilizing a MacStadium desktop for course instruction to learn Xcode and Swift as they completed assignments and projects.

With a virtual lab of **30 MacStadium cloud-hosted Mac minis**, students were able to continue their coursework uninterrupted

Students would either have access to their own Mac mini, or they would share with other students. Depending on the changing needs of the students as they worked on assignments, Takaki needed a solution that would enable him to easily set up the Mac minis and reassign access as needed. With MacStadium taking care of all infrastructure needs, Takaki was pleased to discover that he would not have to spend time maintaining any hardware, enabling him to focus on teaching.

Impact on St. Clair College

Getting started with MacStadium-powered Mac minis was quick and easy for Takaki and his students. Performance-wise, the students did not notice a difference between working with the MacStadium Mac minis when compared with the machines they were used to in their Mac labs.

Takaki was also impressed with MacStadium's support team regarding their quick response times, knowledge, and assistance with any issues that came up for Takaki or his students. "The machines were very helpful for our students and worked perfectly. To be honest, it slipped my mind that we even were using them for most of the semester because I experienced no issues. It just runs," stated Takaki.

In fact, Takaki and his students discovered some other surprising benefits of working with MacStadium. Students were able to use their own dedicated Mac minis or were able to share them for completing projects, enabling Takaki to better manage resources and cost. Also, students that were working on Android development found that their personal computers were underpowered, so they were able to install Android on the MacStadium Mac minis to complete their assignments.

Conclusion

As the COVID-19 pandemic continued to unfold, Takaki's students continued to rely on the MacStadium Mac minis to complete coursework in the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 semesters.

Although St. Clair College's students will return to in-person classroom instruction at some point in the future, working with remote MacStadium Mac minis offers an interesting use case for Takaki's classes. For example, now that a viable Mac bare metal cloud solution exists, St. Clair College could potentially offer its courses in development to remote, international students in the future, thus increasing enrollment.

“To be honest, it slipped my mind that we even were using them for most of the semester because I experienced no issues.”

Darren Takaki
Professor, Mobile
Applications Development
St. Clair College

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