VCSU, other colleges move away from landline phones
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By Ben Rodgers
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JAMESTOWN — Madey Hornung, a sophomore at Jamestown College, spends up to an hour a day on her cell phone talking and texting to her friends and family.

“It’s pretty sad but it’s pretty vital,” she said. “I feel lost without it sometimes.”

Hornung said she knows only one friend at the college who is without a cell phone, which fits in with a wide trend as more and more students are going wireless.

Landline telephones at higher learning institutions in the region are going the way of the VCR. Schools are starting the process of switching or eliminating services to provide improved technology and lower costs.

The University of South Dakota in Vermillion, S.D., recently cut the phone lines to all dorm rooms because students rely so much on cell phones, according to The Associated Press. The school had been paying $168,000 a year to maintain the lines.

Valley City State University also is doing away with landline technology as more students rely on cell phones and the Internet for their communications needs, said Doug Anderson, director of communication and marketing at VCSU.

Only about five out of the 300 students living on campus are using landlines for long-distance calls, Anderson said.

“A vast majority of students are using cell phones these days,” he said.

VCSU will be installing software called SoftPhone, a program that lets students use their school laptops to make telephone calls using a technology called Voice over Internet Protocol, or VoIP, said Joe Tykwinski, the school’s chief information officer. The change is expected to happen in January.
VoIP is a way to talk on the phone but instead of traditional phone lines, local area network connections move the information, Tykwinski said.

“This is already in the workplace,” he said.

With the software installed, students will have access to everyone with a VCSU laptop, Tykwinski said.

The software also will give users the option to instant message, voice chat or video conference with anybody on the network, he said. The technology will enable VCSU students to communicate with anyone on the planet with the same software.

“It becomes a learning tool that’s basically free communication anywhere you are,” Tykwinski said.

VCSU entered a five-year contract with Cisco Systems, from which it bought the equipment to run SoftPhone, he said. The price over five years is $240,000, which will cost slightly less than the old system — an analog phone system with a few VoIP phones.

At Jamestown College, a fiber optic network is already in place, which is why the school is switching to VoIP for faculty and administration offices, said Tom Heck, vice president of business affairs.

Fiber optic is a method of transferring data that uses beams of light going through glass fibers rather than electrical signals through metal wires.

Once the phone lines are converted over, Heck said, the school will discontinue its use of landline phones and place several VoIP phones in the residence halls.

“Eventually we’ll be running all of our phone lines through fiber,” he said.