Remote video cameras allow USU faculty to observe EC-ATP students.

Before classes started this fall, Dave Harris took a five-day, 1,650-mile road trip around the state of Utah, but it wasn’t just a last-ditch effort to have some end-of-summer fun. For Harris, the tech support specialist for the Early Childhood-Alternative Teacher Preparation (EC-ATP) program at Utah State University’s Center for Persons with Disabilities, it was all in a day’s work.

EC-ATP is an off-campus, distance education program that provides coursework necessary to license educators to work with families and their children, birth to age 5, who have disabilities. Students enrolled in the EC-ATP program are employed by school districts as preschool special education teachers on emergency letters of authorization.

Harris, a senior computer science major, set up networked video cameras and audio equipment in the classrooms of EC-ATP students at 14 sites across the state. The actual setup is fairly simple, Harris said, but there is a lot of preparation and coordination with the teachers.

“What Dave does is critical to the program,” said Barb Fiechtl, EC-ATP program director and clinical instructor in the department of special education and rehabilitation. “Without being able to check in on the students via the cameras, we couldn’t serve as many people as we do.”

There are currently 25 first-year students and 12 second-year students enrolled in the two-year program. Fiechtl will observe each student three to four times each semester.