

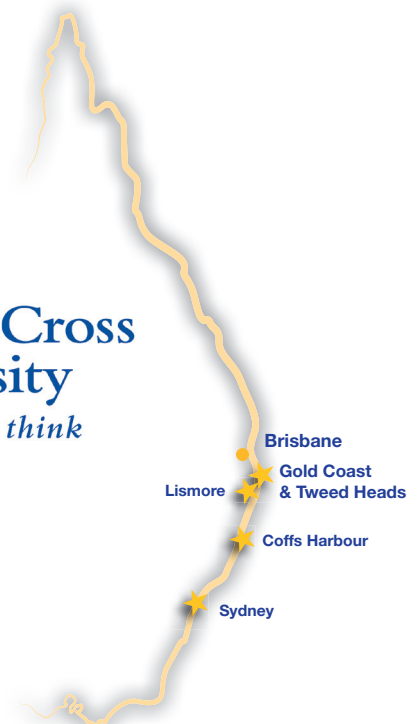
# Southern Cross University Saves Money & Reduces Carbon Emissions

Southern Cross University (SCU) wanted to integrate its 6,400 external students with those on campus to re-engineer the whole approach to student learning delivery and support. In 2005 an online learning space using Blackboard Collaborate was introduced as a pilot in the Southern Cross Business School. Since 2007, session attendance has jumped from about 6,600 to over 24,000, with session playbacks reaching almost 48,000 university-wide. By holding 26 virtual course-review meetings, the University saved \$41,000 AUD on fuel and associated costs and also eliminated 6.1 tonnes of greenhouse gases by not requiring staff to drive the 27,778 kilometres that would have been required had these meetings been held face-to-face.

Southern Cross University is an Australian public university committed to innovative teaching and research. The university has seven academic Schools which teach around 16,000 students.

Its major catchment area is North East New South Wales and South East Queensland but not all of its students are from Australia - some 80 other nationalities are represented. The university campus is on three sites - Lismore, Coffs Harbour, Tweed Heads and Gold Coast - but around 40% of the student body are distance learners.

In 1997, the undergraduate and postgraduate programs offered by the Southern Cross Business School used a print-based teaching model for internal and



external students. As enrolments and the popularity of the courses increased, two teleconferences were added plus a workshop each semester, usually held on a weekend in a capital city.

By 2005/6 it was evident that the supplementary support offered by teleconferences and workshops was no longer effective and attendance by external students had dramatically declined. These sessions were regularly cancelled due to lack of participants and sometimes ran with just a handful of students. The increase in international enrolments was also presenting significant student assessment challenges.

The faculty at Southern Cross Business School needed to reinvigorate contact with the external student body. Stephen Rowe, Auditing Lecturer, explains, "The goal was to become more inclusive and get external students more involved. We also wanted to create common assessment tasks for internal and external students, as well as ensuring that on-campus activities were made available for externals. The ultimate vision was to fully integrate internal and external students rather than treat them as separate cohorts."

### **Innovation Brings Students Together Online**

In 2005, the Southern Cross Business School introduced Blackboard Collaborate with a 25 seat license. The goal was to create virtual classrooms, offices and meeting spaces that opened up more possibilities, to more students, working remotely. It was quickly apparent how successful this could be as a cost effective alternative to workshops and teleconferences for external students. Rowe notes, "the ability to join from any location with an Internet connection, combined with the recording feature, offered the potential to re-engineer the whole approach to student learning delivery and support."

The first year was a great success and in 2006 the Southern Cross Business School purchased a 50 seat license with a commitment from the University to take an unlimited seat licence in the year after. Rowe identifies the adoption of Blackboard Collaborate as being crucial in helping SCU to achieve its strategic objectives through the provision of engaging, inspirational and contemporary

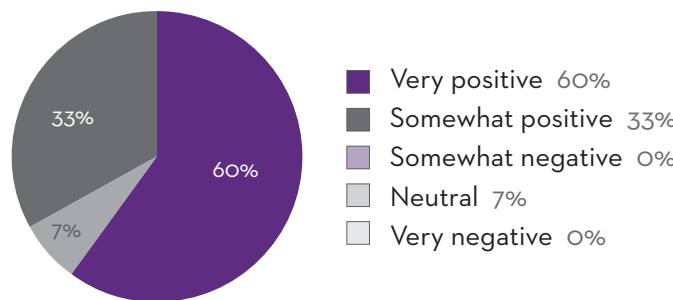
learning experiences for a diverse student body. Rowe adds, "Online learning technology such as Blackboard Collaborate has provided us with the tools to evolve as teachers and the means to connect productively with our students, our colleagues and the wider world."

The introduction of this innovative online learning technology was not without its challenges and required a significant cultural change amongst the teaching and student bodies. The university adopted a bottom-up, change-management programme, which used 'product champions' and 'early adopters' to showcase the features and benefits of the new tools. Students quickly began to appreciate the advantages of online lectures and particularly the provision of recorded live and pre-recorded materials. And it was their demand for more of this that drove change and lecturer adoption.

The effect of Blackboard Collaborate on the work of Southern Cross University has been profound. Critically, the system is set up to work across a wide range of connection speeds, taking into account the different circumstances of students within Australia and abroad. Session attendance has grown from 6,628 in 2007, to 24,396 in 2010. Participation is via audio, chat and the whiteboard and those who are unable to attend can catch-up by accessing recordings, which are available in alternative formats, produced using Publish. In 2010 there were 47,652 viewings, a jump of 40,000 since 2007. Student feedback has been equally encouraging; as one student states, "learning through collaboration and discussing issues, gave us respect to discuss and debate like in the business world."

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### **OVERALL SATISFACTION OF USING BLACKBOARD COLLABORATE FOR 2010: COMMERCE AND MANAGEMENT COURSE REVIEWS**



In terms of what works best, lecturers report that the use of chat is very popular amongst students, although they are less inclined to provide audio contributions. The variety of tasks that can be performed on the whiteboard is impressive and the chance to share applications is very popular. Student feedback is also very encouraging, with one student saying, "I had not really participated in Blackboard Collaborate before, only listened to recordings. It's just as good as going to a classroom, but without the hassle", whilst another student stated, "there was no difference being an internal or external student. I got the same as an internal class."

Since the initial pilot began, Blackboard Collaborate now has a wide range of other uses at the university. Faculty and students have been particularly impressed with the way in which the technology is transforming the delivery of presentations.

**Using Blackboard Collaborate has made it possible to support:**

- ▶ In-session student presentations to peers for assessments
- ▶ Students sharing their experiences with visitors to conferences
- ▶ Orientation sessions for new students
- ▶ Graduate guests and subject matter experts who share their knowledge

## Saving Time and Money

Blackboard Collaborate also benefits the whole University from an operational point of view by strengthening its commitment to environmental sustainability principles, a key objective in the University's strategic sustainability plan.

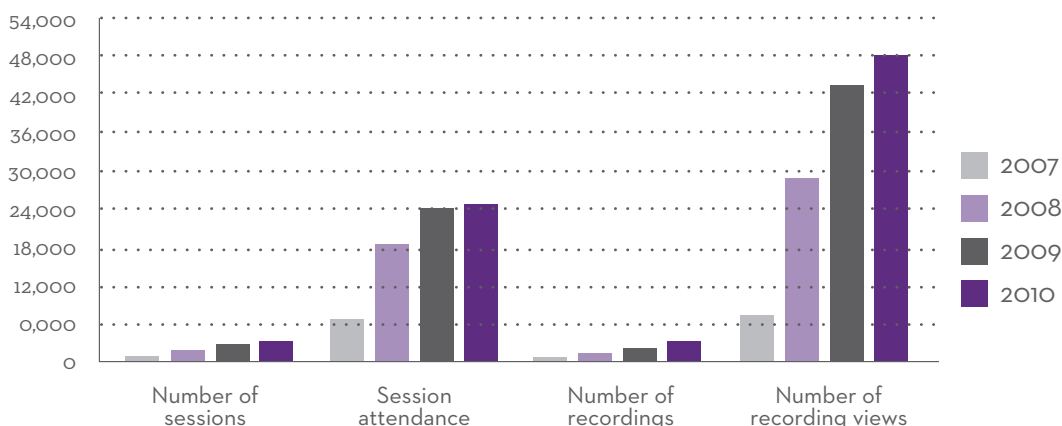
In spring 2010, Southern Cross Business School conducted a research project to determine how 26 virtual course-review meetings compared to face-to-face meetings in terms of financial and environment impact and the quality and outcomes. The study shows that by substituting online collaboration, the University has been able to save the time staff spend travelling and dedicate it to teaching, research and service activities. Cost savings include \$41,000 AUD on fuel plus the costs associated with vehicle usage, overnight accommodation, food and rooms required for meetings.

The research also concluded that 27,778 kilometres of travel was avoided, with the associated reduction of 6.1 tonnes of greenhouse gases. For these 26 meetings alone, this equates to 43% of the amount of greenhouse gases emitted by one average Australian household annually.

**The research also confirmed that there was little effect on quality or outcome of meetings:**

- ▶ 93% of respondents stated that they had a very positive or somewhat positive overall experience using Blackboard Collaborate to conduct course review meetings
- ▶ 67% believed the quality of outcomes was the same or better than face to face meetings
- ▶ 93% believed the program was as effective at achieving the desired outcomes as face to face meetings.

## BLACKBOARD COLLABORATE USAGE



As Rowe summarises, “while face to face meetings will always have a place at the University, Blackboard Collaborate has helped on a number of strategic levels. Firstly, it has enabled us to engage external learners with on-campus students successfully. Secondly, it has helped to deliver our overall sustainability objectives. If the full potential of online collaboration is embraced by staff, encouraged further by management, and its use is firmly embedded within academic and organisational structures, the possibilities are limitless.”

**For more information about Blackboard Collaborate, email [IntlChannelSales@blackboard.com](mailto:IntlChannelSales@blackboard.com) or visit [blackboardcollaborate.com](http://blackboardcollaborate.com).**

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