Blackboard
collaborate.™

Schools Easily Upgrade from Wimba Classroom to Blackboard Collaborate Web Conferencing

THREE UNIVERSITIES SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES

Blackboard Collaborate web conferencing combines the best of both Elluminate Live! and Wimba Classroom. By making simple things easy and complex things possible, the product was a significant step forward. However, it also meant that schools using Wimba Classroom faced an upgrade process that was more significant than any previous upgrade.

New User Interface and Administration

Since Blackboard Collaborate web conferencing is based on Elluminate architecture, Wimba Classroom customers not only had to learn the new user interface, they also had to learn a new administration system as well. These two important changes meant Wimba customers would need to carefully and thoughtfully plan the upgrade.

Therefore, Wimba Classroom customers were advised to spend a few months planning their upgrades to have the necessary time to familiarize their Wimba administrators and power users with the major administrative changes, update training materials and computer lab installations, and offer training sessions for their general user populations.

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>
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> *Assistant Director*
> *of Faculty Development*
> *Northern Illinois University*
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Upgrade Paths

To get up to speed on Blackboard Collaborate, Wimba customers either paid for a Collaborate trainer to individually help them through the process, or they attended a group cohort program consisting of eight webinars that covered topics ranging from new features and functionality to administration and upgrade readiness. Regardless of the chosen upgrade path, Wimba customers gained in-depth knowledge to feel confident about moving ahead.

Just as important, they were urged to wait to upgrade until they were fully ready, which meant balancing other technology upgrade initiatives and staffing requirements. As a result, numerous schools reported having a much easier upgrade experience than they anticipated.

Northern Illinois University

Jason Rhode, assistant director of faculty development at the Instructional Design Center at Northern Illinois University (NIU), manages his large university's installations of both Blackboard Learn and Blackboard Collaborate. Since he was already familiar with managing large technology upgrades, he participated in a Blackboard Collaborate Cohort Program in Fall 2011 to gain a baseline understanding of the changes he'd need to implement at NIU. As a power user of Wimba Classroom, NIU used it extensively for both academic and administrative purposes, such as live classes, office hours, task force committee meetings, and faculty training. So, Rhode's team had a lot of users relying on their expertise.

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Rhode and his team started quickly but cautiously. After participating in the cohort program, his team immediately offered a series of preview webinars to the NIU community to gradually familiarize users with the new changes. His team also asked faculty and staff several survey questions about how they intended to use Blackboard Collaborate based on previous use of Wimba and used that feedback to tailor subsequent training materials.

With a strong understanding of how NIU faculty and staff wanted to use Blackboard Collaborate, Rhode's team offered several on-site and online trainings. They made Blackboard Collaborate available in all courses in the Fall 2012 semester for anyone who wanted to use it, explaining that Wimba would be disabled at the end of the year.

"By participating in the cohort program a year before turning off Wimba Classroom, we feel we gave ourselves plenty of time to anticipate our users' needs and get them up to speed," says Rhode.

Florida Hospital College of Health Sciences

At Florida Hospital College of Health Sciences (FHCHS), Wimba Classroom is the foundation of its entire online curriculum. That meant FHCHS needed to upgrade to Blackboard Collaborate web conferencing as smoothly as possible or risk disrupting a significant number of courses.

To ensure a successful upgrade, Dan Lim, Ph.D., vice president of Education Technology & Distance Learning, and David Tao, instructional technologist, made the conscious decision to take their time and slowly ease the school into the new platform with the following strategy:

- **Pilot a couple of courses in Blackboard Collaborate.**
- **Set a realistic deadline for transitioning all courses.**
- **Showcase strong points of Blackboard Collaborate to faculty and staff.**
- **Mix virtual training with face-to-face training.**

Lim and Tao also enlisted their stable of experienced technology trainers to reach as many faculty as possible. The trainers employed the following best practices:

- **Make sure faculty use their own computers during each training.**
- **Provide strong help desk support in the beginning.**
- **Offer live support to any user during his or her first live online session.**

By building in these extra safety nets, FHCHS instructors gained the confidence they needed to ensure their classes could be held smoothly via Blackboard Collaborate web conferencing.

"Blackboard Collaborate timely arrival enabled our institution to implement critical distance learning initiatives concurrently: transitioning from a LMS-specific, text-based synchronous sessions in all distance courses, verifying student identity, improving student engagement, and extending institution mission. Thus far, it has been a surprisingly smooth transition for both faculty and students," says Lim.

University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences

At the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS), Sarah E. Crawley, eLearning specialist, and Robin M. Smith, Ph.D., coordinator of eLearning, have overseen the campus-wide implementation of Wimba Classroom since 2007. Annually, this includes more than 600 faculty teaching medical courses to approximately 2,500 students worldwide. With such a large global footprint, UAMS had to ensure a cautious rollout of Blackboard Collaborate, while taking advantage of all of the new features and functionality as soon as possible.

Like the team at NIU, Crawley and Smith participated in the Fall 2011 Blackboard Collaborate Cohort Program for Wimba Classroom Customers. After learning the many facets of upgrading, Crawley and Smith used the Spring 2012 semester to train a small team and to further familiarize themselves with the new product, all in anticipation of a campus-wide dual-deployment in the Fall 2012 semester.

By dual-deploying—running Wimba Classroom in production while simultaneously allowing early-adopter faculty and staff to use Blackboard Collaborate—UAMS had the best of both worlds. Those who weren't ready to upgrade could still use their familiar Wimba environment, while those ready to proceed full steam ahead with Blackboard Collaborate could immediately use the new technology.

During the Fall 2012 semester, Crawley and Smith also offered one-and-one and group trainings for those faculty still using Wimba, buying more time for the school and the upgrade. "We decided a cautious approach was best for our whole school, yet at the same time we allowed some of our more aggressive faculty to immediately enjoy Collaborate," says Smith.

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To learn more about upgrading to Blackboard Collaborate, visit bbcollaborate.com/upgrade.

For a free, 30-day trial of Blackboard Collaborate, visit bbcollaborate.com/try

For more information, contact us at collaboratesales@blackboard.com.

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