

Blackboard & Los Angeles City College

LOS ANGELES CITY COLLEGE DELIVERS COST-EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

Communication is critical to any relationship, whether personal or professional, public or private. But talk is not always cheap, and maintaining dialogue between a college or university and thousands of current and prospective students often comes at a price. At Los Angeles City College in California, however, administrators are ensuring that communications remain not only open but fiscally prudent—essential in today’s economic climate—through the power of the Blackboard Connect service..

CHALLENGE:

Falling budgets for community colleges

Set on a 49-acre campus adjacent to Central Los Angeles, LACC, with nearly 18,000 students, is perhaps “one of the most diverse campuses in the California state system,” says Dr. Jamillah Moore, president of the college. Situated near Koreatown, Fillipinotown and Little Armenia, the school services a vibrant international community, further enlivened by a large contingency of adult learners.

Moore, who formerly served at the California Community College System Office as a senior vice-chancellor for governmental and external relations, has seen the college grow phenomenally since the time when both her parents attended the school. Just within the past two years, the college has greatly enhanced its offerings with a new and advanced technology learning facility, library, and child development center. Yet, lingering economic uncertainty in the state budget—with projected deficits of \$20 billion each year for five more years—have fallen heavily on public higher education

QUICK FACTS

- ▶ 54% of students are immigrants to the U.S.
- ▶ 48% speak a language other than English at home
- ▶ 50% are First Generation College students
- ▶ 47% receive financial aid

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Jamillah Moore, Ed.D.
President Los Angeles City College

institutions within the state; the University of California and California State University system alone have been hit with 20 percent cuts in funding, while \$6 billion has been slashed from K-12 public schools and community colleges.

“The double-digit deficit caused us to reexamine our expenses in all areas, including student and faculty communications,” says Moore. “The challenge was how to get information out quickly, to sustain our enrollment, but to do so in the face of declining resources.” What was needed, says Moore, “was not just to think out of the box, but to dismantle the box and move it aside, to come up with a new and viable alternative to spending thousands of dollars on traditional mailings to keep our students informed.”

SOLUTION:

Cost-effective, multichannel messaging

What the college eventually hit upon was Blackboard Connect, the mass notification service that allows time-sensitive information to be distributed to thousands simultaneously. “It’s a proven way to deliver our messages cost-effectively, and ensure that students stay involved and prepared,” says Moore.

Through voice, e-mail or text, the Blackboard Connect service allows colleges and universities to reach constituents in just minutes, with messages delivered to the student’s preferred devices, whether cell phones, landlines or computers. An intuitive interface and simple process make it possible for administrators to record communications in their own voice, thus personalizing the message. “The simplicity of the technology lets us concentrate on what is being said, not on how it is being delivered,” notes Moore. “It’s easy to record, schedule, send and track communications to our entire community.”

The Blackboard Connect service offers unique benefits to school administrators, by supporting enrollment management, timely notifications and campus outreach efforts through a direct communication channel with students. In addition, the system can be used to notify entire campus communities of closures and contingency plans due to unforeseen events. Thousands of messages can be sent, requiring no additional hardware. The service can be used from any computer with Internet access or telephone, ensuring that administrators can send vital messages whenever needed, from wherever they are located. Additionally, administrators receive detailed reports on contacts that did not receive a message, enabling them to follow up through alternative means as necessary.

Today, college students, faculty and staff at nearly 500 campuses nationwide are served by the Blackboard Connect multimodal mass notification service.

RESULT:

Significant savings, enhanced communication

By 1:30 pm, the University EOC had been deactivated. Moore explains that the service proved itself particularly vital after the district decided to cancel the majority of its summer sessions in a money-saving effort. “Students were confused over which semesters were being dropped,” says Moore, “so we used the Blackboard Connect service to apprise them of the fact that the first summer sessions, which began on June 15th, were still being offered, with only the summer sessions after July 1st being eliminated. In so doing, Blackboard Connect helped to keep our enrollment figures up.” As well, the school has employed the service to alert students to key dates for adding or dropping classes, billing information and parking on campus. “We’ve also used it to keep our faculty informed about staff development and training issues,” Moore adds.

Currently, the school uses the service for sending messages to cell and landline phones, although it plans to expand usage to include texting, to keep pace with the students’ changing communications desires. Because the service can be thoroughly customized, the school can craft its messages either in English, Spanish or any number of languages, allowing administrators to speak directly to the students in a tone and manner that is most effective for understanding. And easy personalization enables the school to have its communications delivered by whomever it envisions as having the greater impact, from the director of admissions through the president herself.

Moore shares that, prior to the Blackboard Connect service, the school was spending about \$150,000 on mailing postcard reminders to students. “Now we’ve cut that amount in half,” notes Moore. About two messages go out per semester, with tens of thousands of students reached in just minutes. And Moore sees the service becoming even more valuable in the days ahead, as the Obama administration continues its push to boost community college enrollment and more and more students turn to LACC for the training and job skills required to adjust to the changing economic demands. What’s more, the school is considering a further

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expansion of the service by adding emergency notifications to its communications schedule, alerting students, faculty and administrators to critical occurrences on campus, such as an outbreak of the H1N1 virus. “The possibilities are endless,” says Moore, “and our ability to grow the system is made that much more effortless because of the responsive support we receive from Blackboard Connect.”

The Foundation for California Community Colleges (FCCC)—the official foundation for the California Community Colleges Board of Governors and System Office—has selected Blackboard Connect as its official mass notification service provider. Under the agreement, the Blackboard Connect platform will be available to community college leaders throughout with state, giving them the ability to quickly contact the 2.6 million students attending California’s more than 100 community colleges, as well reach faculty and staff with crucial information.

“Not just LACC, but all community colleges these days need viable options for connecting directly with their students in a fast and efficient manner for any number of reasons,” says Moore. “Blackboard Connect has become an integral part of our enrollment management plans. And through our partnership, we’ve put in place the means to continue to achieve our goals cost-effectively.”

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