

The University of Southern Mississippi

THE UNIVERSITY INCREASES ONLINE ENROLLMENTS EXPONENTIALLY WITH BLACKBOARD COLLABORATE PLATFORM

Over the last few years, The University of Southern Mississippi (Southern Miss) has been involved in strategic planning for the growth of its fully online programs. This effort includes expanding use of the Blackboard Collaborate platform: web conferencing, voice authoring, and enterprise instant messaging. Along with increasing enrollment by 25 percent and reducing travel costs, going online has yielded the university some unexpected benefits as well.

Growth of Fully Online Programs

Under the umbrella of Eagle Learning Online, Southern Miss currently offers 36 online or hybrid programs, including undergraduate, graduate and certificate. The number of students enrolled in online courses has grown over the last few years, with more than 12,000 students now using Blackboard in some way, whether for a fully online class or as a supplement for a hybrid or face-to-face class.

"On average we have more than 4,000 students enrolled in fully online courses every semester," says Amy Thornton, project manager. "With these numbers, it is absolutely critical that we provide tools to allow these students to effectively communicate and collaborate with each other as well as with their instructor."

According to Thornton, Blackboard Collaborate has enabled Southern Miss to offer programs that otherwise would not be available as they need a live, interactive component, such as the university's undergraduate Construction Management, Nursing, and Casino Management programs, as well as its Master of Arts in the Teaching of Languages.

Blackboard Collaborat has enabled Southern Miss to offer programs that otherwise would not be available

> a live, interactive component.

Amy Thornton, Project Manager The University of Southern Mississippi



1blackboardcollaborate.com

Language Teaching and Learning Requires Interaction

In the Master of Arts in the Teaching of Languages, students can choose a French, Spanish, or TESOL emphasis. To be successful in a program where students are required to speak in a second language, it is essential to have tools available to allow students to complete their assignments and communicate with each other using that language.

Instructors in this program use web conferencing to hold live sessions where students must converse exclusively in their second language. They are also required to use voice authoring tools to complete assignments. With Blackboard Collaborate, instructors have additional ways to assess their students other than through writing.

Using Blackboard Collaborate to allow faculty to connect with their students on our Gulf Park campus has a significant impact on reducing travel costs.

Amy Thornton, Project Manager The University of Southern Mississippi

Students Hit the Jackpot with Casino Management

One of the faculty members in the Casino Management program developed the Industry Professionals Assistance in Students Success instructional method for the casino, hospitality, and tourism online courses. Industry executives provide input during course development to ensure an industry and a competencies-focused curriculum in which students gain first-hand information. Instructors use Blackboard Collaborate to connect their students with these industry professionals.

Executives from casinos across the country and beyond, including participants from China, have been guest lecturers in the program. Blackboard Collaborate made it possible for students to talk with industry professionals whom they would otherwise never meet. Some of the casino executives have also found the connection useful as a way of meeting potential future employees. "Blackboard Collaborate has provided a great avenue for connecting the university to the communities and industries we serve," says Thornton.

Reduced Travel Costs

Another example of how Blackboard Collaborate has had an impact on Southern Miss is the reduction in travel expenses. "As budgets get cut every year, the administration continually looks for ways to save money," Thornton says. "Using Blackboard Collaborate to allow faculty to connect with their students on our Gulf Park campus has a significant impact on reducing travel costs."

Online Presence Thwarts Intruder

For one lucky Southern Miss student, attending a class online via Blackboard Collaborate had some unanticipated, but very welcome, benefits. Special education faculty member Marge Crowe was holding a live evening class when one student sent a message via the session chat that someone was breaking into her house. The quick-thinking Crowe had the student go somewhere safe and call 911.

While hiding in a closet waiting for the police, the student began texting another student in the class with a blow-by-blow account of what was happening. This was relayed to the entire class of 25, who waited with her, albeit virtually. The student also asked the instructor to keep talking. Hearing Crowe's voice through the speakers, the intruder thought someone was in the house and ran away. When the police arrived, they apprehended the would-be robber, who weighed 245 pounds and had a record, in the student's back yard.

"At one point, I forgot everything I knew about special education," says Crowe. "I was about to go into a rhapsody of recipes or something to keep talking when the police arrived. So the student was saved by Blackboard Collaborate!"

