Blackboard collaborate™

University of Utah Improves Retention & Student Outcomes

Nestled along the western front of the Wasatch Mountain range, the University of Utah in Salt Lake City not only boasts one of the world's most scenic campuses, but it also boasts one of the world's leading distance and hybrid education programs. Since 2000, the University's Technology Assisted Curriculum Center has furiously and effectively implemented myriad educational technology solutions that have enabled the school to accommodate growing enrollments, improve student outcomes, and save time and money.

With more than 10,000 undergraduate students, the University of Utah is one of the largest institutions in the state. Its students can choose from a broad and diverse range of courses, many of which now feature an online component within Blackboard Vista. However, in the mid-2000's, the University's IT team noticed that students in some online courses weren't performing up to expectations.

The University's Technology Assisted Curriculum Center – which works closely with the statewide Utah Education Network (UEN) – had been familiar with Blackboard Collaborate for several years, as it had been used to hold virtual meetings across the state in order to reduce travel and time spent out of the office. For instance, the 'Four Corners' area of the state where Arizona, Colorado,

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>
> Linda Ralston
> *Technology Assisted Curriculum Center*
> *University of Utah*

New Mexico, and Utah come together and touch, is quite remote. The College of Eastern Utah in Blanding has a small campus there and it began using Blackboard Collaborate in 2005 to connect its students and the campus with the rest of the state.

According to Cory Stokes, who was then with UEN but is now the Director of the University of Utah's Technology Assisted Curriculum Center, the Blanding campus "saved so much money" with Blackboard Collaborate by not having individuals drive 4-to-5 hours to get to meetings and then driving the 4-to-5 hour trip back – which usually meant an overnight stay. "The savings Blackboard Collaborate brought to that small branch campus made it a very compelling service to everyone throughout the state," Stokes said in 2008. "The money it saves the state is more than the cost of the license itself."

With such demonstrable success for online meetings, the decision to utilize Blackboard Collaborate for online courses was a no-brainer. The University aggressively trained faculty across its entire campus on how to use Blackboard Collaborate and then quickly saw campus-wide success.

From language learning to business courses, Blackboard Collaborate quickly became an integral addition to courses in all academic departments. This was critically important because many students who were taking online and/or hybrid courses (courses that meet face-to-face but also have a CMS component) until this point weren't scoring as highly as expected on many assignments. The University wondered if these students weren't being engaged enough online. Also, students that don't perform well tend to withdraw from courses, thereby not being retained, causing schools to lose valuable tuition dollars.

Thankfully, Blackboard Collaborate solved many of these problems.

By using Blackboard Collaborate at University of Utah:

▸ **The attrition rate of online courses is now only 8.5% while the attrition rate of face-to-face courses is 16.5%**

▸ **Several departments reduced the average spend-per-student by 42%**
(from $195/student before hybrid Spanish courses, to $115 per student)

▸ **Students listening to archives achieved 24% higher grades on course quizzes and final exams than students who only utilized alternative Powerpoint slides with no audio**

▸ **82% of students said they were 'likely' or 'very likely' to recommend a synchronous course to friends**

To show the breadth of use of Blackboard Collaborate, for academic uses, such as offering live online instruction, as of the Spring 2010 semester, the University of Utah's Technology Assisted Curriculum Center supported:

▸ **1,038 active and/or archived rooms**

▸ **11,097 active users**

▸ **10,994 usage hours**

For administrative uses such as meetings and staff training, as of the Spring 2010 semester, the University had:

▸ **2,269 active rooms**

▸ **4,364 active users**

▸ **4,062 usage hours**

Perhaps Linda Ralston, Director of Distance Education for the University's Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Department, sums it best when she says, "Students who watch archives in Blackboard Collaborate tend to have 24% higher grades on course quizzes and final exams than students who only utilize alternative Powerpoint slides with no audio. That's the difference between earning an 'A' in my class versus earning a 'C.' That's a significant difference."

Indeed it is.

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