

Blackboard Powers Online Learning for Westinghouse

Westinghouse Electric Company has long been at the forefront of the world energy stage. The Monroeville, PA-based company's facility produces state-of-the-art equipment and operating systems for nearly 50 percent of the world's commercial nuclear power plants. As the global search for energy solutions continues, the company's business—manufacturing advanced pressured water reactor systems for new facilities and components for existing ones— is thriving.

Another important aspect of Westinghouse's offering is training customers, which can be a highly complex process. Content must be provided to customers across the globe and internal subject matter experts must be prepared to deliver it.

The company has also been in a rapid growth phase, hiring on average 100 or more new employees per month. All of these factors have placed a great deal of pressure on the training department, which is responsible for educating commercial customers, internal subject matter experts and new hires.

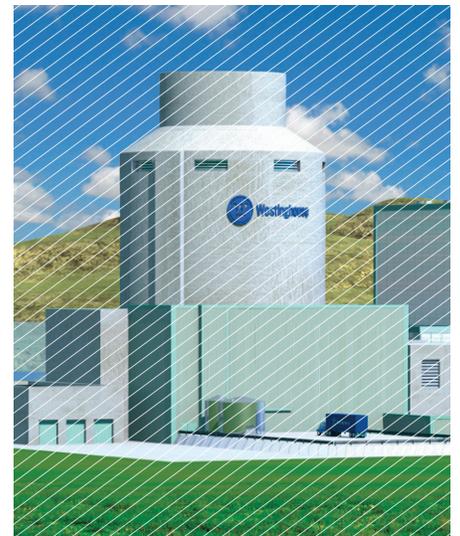
Hybrid Courses Deliver the Best Combination of Resource Utilization and Improved Learning

It may come as a surprise that the nuclear power industry is quite traditional in its instruction techniques. In fact, Westinghouse's use of interactive, online, instructor-led courses breaks the traditional classroom lecture approach.

Pam Aigner, Director of Online Programs, handles Westinghouse's customer training. She pointed out that even though some customers say they prefer the traditional classroom, they're unaware of how much more effective the online component makes their training. "They like the hands-on element in the classroom. What they don't realize is how much more time they are able to spend working with the equipment because of what they learned online before ever setting foot in the classroom," she said.

THE CHALLENGE:

Streamline training of new hires and customers, and increase instructor effectiveness.



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Pam Aigner
Director of Online Programs

Aigner cited anecdotes she has received from several customers indicating that this approach is resulting in highly effective learning:

- ▶ **Students have been able to recite information from memory six months after training**
- ▶ **When faced with a system malfunction at their home facility, three recently trained individuals isolated the problem in an hour, and related, “There is no way we would have been able to do that before.”**
- ▶ **In a disagreement over the source of a plant problem between an experienced engineer and two technicians who had trained via the online class, the technicians' analysis was the correct one.**

Online Learning Reduces Travel and Improves Student Interaction and Learning

Westinghouse maintains personnel at more than 35 locations around the world. Access to online instruction saves the time and expense that would be required if face-to-face classroom instruction was the only option.

According to Lorraine Matisko, one of Westinghouse's Instructors, extra time also affords better learning. “When training can be spread out over time, it's much more conducive to reflection and assimilation than just cramming information in over a few days. It also provides time to work on assignments that are directly related to specific job responsibilities. We wouldn't have time for that in a traditional classroom,” she explained.

Matisko, who has taught online students from around the world, believes that Blackboard Learn™ discussion boards also provide opportunities for student interaction that surpass those in the classroom. In particular, she pointed out that many learners who do not speak out in person may be more likely to respond in the written format. “Cultural and language challenges can be less obvious online, and no one can ‘dominate’ the conversation,” she noted. She added that learning is then powerfully reinforced through reading, writing and other processing that is required to participate in the discussion board environment.

Blackboard Learn Helps Pave the Way to the Future

Pam Aigner explained that the reason for implementing online learning was to improve the quality of training at a time of tremendous industry growth. As the world's energy needs put increasing pressure on those who supply it, she said, “The number of people we have to train has grown tremendously, but our resources to do that haven't grown nearly as much. By capturing knowledge in this way, we can be more flexible and effective in addressing the needs of our instructors and students.”

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