Blackboard
learn⁺

Abu Dhabi University Gets Online with Blackboard

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES' LARGEST PRIVATE UNIVERSITY TAKES CONTENT MANAGEMENT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Abu Dhabi University (ADU) is the largest private university in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). It was founded in 2000 by his Highness Sheikh Hamdan Bin Zayed Al Nahyan and other distinguished citizens. It opened its doors in September 2003 to a first class of 1,000 students on two campuses in Abu Dhabi and Al Ain.

The founders of ADU envisioned an institution that would be among the best, not just in the Arabian Gulf but throughout the world. Central to ADU's vision is the commitment to become a major provider of online study programmes. Today ADU serves an international student body drawn from over 35 different nationalities, including a very strong enrolment of Emirati students.

ADU provides undergraduate and postgraduate degrees based on the North American model, and several professional diploma and postgraduate diploma programs using the British system of post secondary education. The official language of the university is English but degree and diploma programs are also provided in Arabic. The English Language Institute at ADU assists students with the improvement of their English language skills to meet the English language proficiency requirements.

Challenge and Objectives

The management team at ADU set up a taskforce to scour the world for the best possible learning management system. Chair of team, Dr James Mackin had experience of deploying Blackboard with an American university prior to joining ADU.

He was determined that this should not influence the decision and so the team reviewed a whole range of different systems including open-source solutions such a Moodle. The attraction of the open-source solution was that the software was essentially free but the team at ADU also knew that this would require a vast amount of technical support which was not readily available at ADU which has a relatively small IT infrastructure.

blackboardlearn.com

The team was concerned that that Blackboard required a considerable investment but when they conducted a thorough cost analysis, they found that Blackboard 9.1 was considerably less expensive than an open-source solution. In short, it proved to be the only comprehensive education technology platform that came with the support staff and programs that learning institutions require in order to achieve their academic goals.

Strategy and Implementation

A new Centre for Faculty Development (CFD) was created at ADU to ensure the successful implementation of Blackboard. This was staffed with a Director, Instructional Designer, and Blackboard Manager, all with advanced degrees from North American universities. The CFD represents one of the very few units of this type in the Gulf Region.

Under the leadership of its Director, a combination of approaches to implementing Blackboard 9.1 were conceived and executed. These included face-to-face training, online training and currently an advanced training program based on the Blackboard Exemplary Course program.

The CFD hosts a Blackboard Support Center staffed by students who work equally with faculty and other students. In the first year over half of the faculty participated in the training and in year two there has been another major push as student demand for the use of Blackboard in their courses, increases.

A key element in the introduction of the learning management system was a 'guinea pig' course, taught by Dr Mackin. The aim was to work through any bugs or learning blocks so that knowledge and best practice could be passed on to those that followed behind.

Adoption was also driven by requiring students and faculty to use Blackboard for grading. This led them to find new and more interesting features and thereby slowly engage with all of the system's features and benefits. This resulted in every faculty member using one of more of Blackboard features . Thereafter there was a noticeable increase in demand for training on more sophisticated tools such as collaboration, course cartridges from textbook publishers and most recently NBC Learn.

Results

Dr Mackin is very happy with the implementation of Blackboard 9.1 at ADU and believes a lot of it is down to the interest and engagement of the faculty and students. 'I've not seen or heard of an adoption across an institute go as smoothly or with such enthusiasm. Early on we booked a room for 50 people to see a demo and we ended up having to bring in extra chairs because there was so much interest. By the end of the session we had provided basic training to over half the faculty which is almost unheard of.'

From a technology point of view, probably the most impressive feature for Dr Mackin is the content management system. 'This is the new thing that we are really pleased to have. It makes it very easy to manipulate files. And that is the biggest advantage of Blackboard 9.1 from our point of view'.

ADU is still working on the integration of the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system with Blackboard. Once the ERP system is fully implemented, grades will be exported out of Blackboard and into the ERP system at the end of each term reducing even further the duplication of data entry requirements by professors.

Looking to the future, ADU aims to become the main deliverer of online learning in the UAE with the next stage being the deployment of Blackboard Mobile Learn and Blackboard Mobile Central. 'Our students are thrilled with 9.1 and they have already said they'd like to be using Blackboard mobile which is really encouraging,' says Mackin.

For More Information

If you are interested to learn more on how Blackboard can help you and your organization increase the impact of education, please contact your account manager or visit us at www.blackboard.com

Blackboard International
Paleisstraat 1-5
1012 RB Amsterdam
The Netherlands
+31 (0) 20 788 2450

Bb

Blackboard