

Finding the right blend: Enhancing the teaching & learning experience with Blackboard

The Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (Catholic University of the Sacred Heart) is a prestigious Italian university and has over 40,000 students distributed across five campuses. With 14 faculties, 52 three-year major tracks, 42 graduate level degrees, one four-year degree, over 100 master tracks, 53 specializations and five postgraduate Schools. It is Europe's most important Catholic University, and the only university in Italy operating on a national scale.

Initial Use

The Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore first invested in an elearning platform in the year 2000 having evaluated a number of proprietary and open source solutions. Blackboard Learn was chosen on the basis that it was the most complete solution both in its tools for teaching and learning and on the administrative level.

Originally the institution's investment in Blackboard was used to support an initiative to develop programmes of distance learning to reach all regions of the country. However, a subsequent change in the university's strategic direction led to a change in the institution's requirements of its online learning solution. It therefore set itself the goal of making Blackboard the key in a blended learning solution through which all teachers and students would have the ability to take advantage of online tools to support their courses.

Upgrading to Blackboard Learn, Release 9.1

The Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore recognised Blackboard had continued to develop its product lines and that the latest version - Blackboard Learn, Release 9.1 - offered a number of additional features and functionalities that would be invaluable in improving system administration and enhancing the teaching and learning experience. It also recognised the opportunity to realise a number of time and cost efficiencies by integrating Blackboard Learn with its other corporate systems.

The Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore therefore brought in Blackboard's consulting services to manage the upgrade. The university's current architectural structure was analysed and recommendations made on how to best support and get the most value of the upgrade. Blackboard Consulting

1 blackboardlearn.com

identified designed and implemented all aspects of the data integration between Blackboard Learn and the university's other corporate systems to optimise the performance of the Blackboard environment.

On the administrative side, the platform's ability to integrate with other corporate systems including the SIS database would lead to significant costs and time efficiencies through the automation of many of the tasks previously performed by the system administrator. For example, students would be able to enrol themselves onto their course directly from within Blackboard and instructors' courses would automatically be created in Blackboard at the beginning of each semester.

On the academic side, Blackboard Learn, Release 9.1's social learning tools such as blogs and its ability to integrate collaboration tools such as wikis and multimedia contents from YouTube, Flickr and Slideshare would prove invaluable in encouraging teaching staff take advantage of technology to engage students in the learning process.

Increased adoption and demand from lecturers and students

The Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore's initiative to position Blackboard Learn at the centre of its blended learning strategy has proved a huge success. While only a small number of faculty previously used Blackboard Learn as part of a distance learning strategy, more than 40% of undergraduate & graduate programmes in addition to 70% of specialist Master's courses are now available via Blackboard. This number is expected to increase further following requests from students to be able to access course documents online.

Using the Blackboard Grade Centre, staff have also realised significant time savings and improved feedback mechanisms by allowing students to complete assignments online, tests to be automatically corrected and staff to download the scores for a whole class in one go. Many teachers have even begun to incorporate the new features of Blackboard Learn, Release 9.1 into their courses by introducing blogs and wikis into the learning process.

The widespread capabilities and functionality of Blackboard Learn, Release 9.1 has also led the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore's eLearning team to revise the way that it supports teachers and students in the use of Blackboard. The team has produced a series of video tutorials and short PDF documents to ensure anybody at the institution can ensure they are using Blackboard to its fullest effect. In just one year the resources available to teachers were accessed 3,343 times while those available to students were accessed on 54,375 occasions.

Verdict

"As a leading Italian university and a recognised member of the international scientific community it is important for us to stay at the forefront of elearning. Blackboard's ongoing investment in its Learn platform assures us we made the right choice in positioning it at the heart of our strategy for blended learning" says Flavia Scott, eLearning Program Manager at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore.

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 blackboard.com.

The Blackboard Consulting team has been crucial not only in achieving these results, but also in maintaining them from one academic year to the next.

Flavia Scott eLearning Program Manager Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore

72

