

The California Community Colleges System Saves Millions

Located just south of the Oregon border, northern California's College of the Siskiyous is more than 800 miles north of Imperial Valley College, a fellow California community college located just north of Mexico. One only needs to take a quick glance at any map to see it would take more than 13 hours – without stopping – to drive from one of those campuses to the other; and that doesn't even count the drive back. Yet until 2003, many of the 85,000+ faculty and staff of the California Community Colleges System had to make this very trip – and thousands of similar ones – to attend various committee meetings and training sessions. Needless to say, such drives were inefficient, time consuming, and extremely expensive to reimburse.

Enter Blackboard Collaborate and CCC Confer.

The California Community Colleges System is the nation's largest higher education system, boasting 2.9 million students and 85,000 faculty at 112 campuses. In the early 2000's, the system – in a state now known for its financial woes – took a critical look at its budget and realized it was spending millions of dollars annually on meetings. After all, nearly 100,000 faculty and staff were on committees that required members to drive throughout the entire state to attend meetings. System officials quickly realized it could turn to web conferencing to save time and money while helping them 'go green' at the same time.

Since 2003, by utilizing Blackboard Collaborate – which it has branded 'CCC Confer' – the California Community Colleges System has conducted more than 110,000 live online meetings, thereby saving millions of dollars of gas and mileage reimbursements. And that doesn't even touch on the millions of dollars of saved productivity by eliminating time lost out-of-office hours incurred by driving to meeting locations across the state.

Interestingly, as the System was getting up to speed with its live virtual meetings, it also recognized the value that the full breadth of Blackboard Collaborate technologies could bring to online instruction, and therefore implemented virtual

classroom and asynchronous voice tools into its campuses' online courses. By utilizing collaborative technologies, it not only increased its investment by meeting and teaching live online, but it also retained more than 10,000 students annually, thereby not losing those valuable tuition dollars, according to Blaine Morrow, Project Director of CCC Confer and 3C Media Solutions of Palomar College.

"We initially created CCC Confer to save time by holding meetings online but we expanded courses too. One of our instructors conducted a two-year survey and found that courses that were taught online with a synchronous component had a higher retention rate, success rate, persistence rate, and students earned more A's and B's," says Morrow.

Since it began using Blackboard Collaborate to hold live online classes in addition to virtual meetings, more than 800,000 users (staff, students, and faculty) have met or taken a class live online. In fact, because live virtual classes are so engaging, the System has been able to annually retain more than 10,000 students who otherwise would have dropped out of less-engaging asynchronous online courses. In fact some live online classes now regularly maintain a 90% retention rate.

"Can you imagine what this resource could do statewide?" wonders Patt McDermid, an Online Writing Center Instructor at Sierra College. "We lose tens of thousands of students per year - unconscionable. Especially since now we've found an answer with CCC Confer."

And in addition to remaining enrolled, these online students, who are more engaged in their CCC Confer-enabled courses, naturally perform better as well.

"In our two-year study of student performance of online classes (in Spanish) we looked at student retention and persistence patterns and found no distinction between the student outcomes in the Elementary Spanish 1 in the face-to-face course or the online version of the same," says Laurie Huffman, Spanish Language Instructor in the



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World Language Dept. and Distance Education Chair at Los Medanos College. "In the second year research study conducted of the same courses, sections taught online with the synchronous component of CCC Confer, showed that the integration of live learning equally resulted in higher retention, success and persistence rates ... not to mention more A's and B's."

Saving time and money. Increasing the retention rates of online courses. Improving student achievement. And it's also very easy to do, thanks to CCC Confer.

Perhaps Irene Palacios, a math instructor at Grossmont College sums it up best when she says, "If you're not really good with technology, if you don't have a lot of time and a lot of money, there's only one solution: CCC Confer. There's just no other way."

