Outpost of Excellence: AUD delivers first rate education with Blackboard



Originally founded in 1995 as a branch office of a US-based university, the American University in Dubai (AUD) has undergone rapid expansion and in 2006 became an independently accredited university in its own right. It serves United Arab Emirates nationals and international students who seek world-class career-oriented education and believes a students' success in his or her chosen field of endeavour is the ultimate test of the effectiveness of the educational experience offered by AUD. The university currently offers 700 courses to its 3,000 students and 280 faculty and staff.

Looking for a solution to develop and grow

In 2005, driven by the demands of its lecturers and instructors, AUD set out to find an e-learning platform to enable its staff to transfer teaching materials to its students. After rigorous evaluation the university implemented the Blackboard Learn™ platform. In 2008, AUD extended its use of the Blackboard Learn™ platform to accommodate the rapidly increasing number of students and to take advantage of its numerous innovative features, such as the ability to support engagement and collaboration of the student community beyond the classroom

Expanding from 2,000 students in 2006 to 3,000 by 2010, AUD was

looking for a solution that allowed them do more as they continued to develop and grow. The swift increase in AUD's student population, and associated dependence on its enterprise learning management system, presented a series of new challenges in terms of the demand for increased functionality from students.

Desire from students and staff for web 2.0 features, integrated wikis and dynamic content such as multimedia, online videos and interactive presentations alerted AUD to the fact that it was time to re-evaluate its existing IT infrastructure. AUD therefore set itself the objective of seeking out expert advice on the new technological solutions it required.



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Frank Seifaee, IT Services Department Manager and part-time Professor



A new release to support growth ambitions

To help facilitate AUD's strategy to achieve excellence in teaching and learning, the university contacted its educational solutions provider Blackboard. Blackboard's partnership approach and experience of delivering educational technology solutions to more than 5,000 institutions around the globe ensured it was familiar with AUD's situation and requirements. While AUD's existing virtual learning environment had been the right choice back in 2008, Blackboard understood the university's requirements had changed and that a number of enhancements were due in Blackboard Learn, Release 9.1 that would greatly assist AUD in achieving its aims. Leveraging their expertise of supporting other institutions throughout the upgrade process, Blackboard technical support team therefore worked with AUD to ensure an efficient upgrade process with no system downtime.

A successful upgrade resulting in cost savings

Upgrading to Release 9.1 has been a resounding success for students, faculty and staff alike.

AUD's instructors and administrators really value the cost and time savings associated with having everything integrated into a single system. For example, a number of instructors make extensive use of wikis in their teaching and had been signing up to individual wikis online, or signing up to other companies and services. While this was adequate, it meant a central course file repository was impossible to maintain and more time was spent ensuring

students were aware of and could access materials. Now with wikis integrated into Blackboard Learn, Release 9.1, instructors can effortlessly share content, files and course documents among different courses or sections of courses.

AUD has also seen cost and time improvements resulting from changes in how it addresses plagiarism. The institution had previously used an external solution for detecting plagiarism, but found the process of having to leave the Blackboard Learn environment to run a plagiarism report, before importing the results back into the VLE, both time-consuming and cumbersome. Now using Blackboard's centrally hosted SafeAssign™ plagiarism prevention solution, instructors can check student assignments for unoriginal content seamlessly within the Blackboard Learn platform.

In terms of web 2.0 compatibility, front-end customizations and the integration with multimedia, AUD's multimedia faculty is currently using Blackboard Learn's integration with YouTube and Flickr to develop a platform similar to YouTube, where videos that have been created by its students can now be shared much more easily.

IT Services Department Manager and part-time Professor, Frank Seifaee, comments, "I have experienced Blackboard from both a technical and academic aspect and am delighted with the new features. Release 9.1 has really taken our VLE to the next level, and, we are already seeing the cost savings of having everything integrated into the same system."

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



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