Blackboard & King Khalid University

Blackboard collaborate™

KING KHALID UNIVERSITY DELIVERS LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES ON CAMPUS FOR MALE AND FEMALE STUDENTS

King Khalid University (KKU) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is one of the largest centres of learning in the Middle East. In 2008, KKU introduced Blackboard Collaborate™ to attain regional and global education and instructional excellence along with a more effective provision of their gender-divided campus for more than 65,000 students, half of which are women.

About King Khalid University

King Khalid University (KKU) is headquartered in the city of Abha, in the Asir region of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Spanning 81,000 square kms, the university is comprised of 26 different campuses and 48 colleges, offering further and higher education to its students.

The university was formed in 1998 from the merger of King Saud and Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic universities. It introduced an e-learning centre in 2005 and currently provides courses on a range of subjects, including medicine, pharmacy, computer sciences, engineering, Islamic studies, dentistry and education.

The Challenges

Meeting the strategic goals of KKU has not come without major challenges. Previously, the university operated separate campuses for male and female students. Male instructors were not able to teach female students in face-to-face environments and previously used studios where instructors gave lectures to female students who were watching through a television screen in the room next door. Female students were only permitted to ask questions through a telephone attached to the wall. This approach was prohibitive due to many factors including the cost and maintenance of the studios and the university was determined to devise a more practical and sustainable solution.

Women also faced an additional challenge when it came to travelling to and from lectures. Not permitted to drive, female students at KKU rely upon male relatives to take them to lectures. This was a huge barrier to education, similarly shared with disabled students who also found travelling a challenge as well as costly.

Another challenge was the huge geography and dispersion of campuses that was impacting instructor recruitment. It became difficult to obtain the required number of instructors in

QUICK FACTS

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all programmes and specialities. Instructors were finding themselves spending a significant amount of time travelling long distances to deliver lectures. In some courses, expertise from outside of KSA are a necessity due to the shortage of instructors teaching in the region and to ensure that the university has the most qualified teaching expertise to maintain its reputation for quality.

Driving adoption of Blackboard Collaborate for 21st Century education

In 2005, the university established its first e-learning centre and in 2008, chose Blackboard Collaborate to integrate with the university's primary learning management system, Blackboard Learn™.

Mohammad Qatrawi, Research and Development Manager at the eLearning Center at KKU states "Choosing online collaboration was a strategic decision. We had a solid, clear vision in King Khalid University, and we believe from our vision that e-learning is for everyone. It provides equal chances for all, quality, better student experiences and keeps us up to date with best practices. So, we chose Blackboard Collaborate to support us in achieving our vision."

With its focus on education, many of the features and capabilities of the Blackboard Collaborate™ online collaboration platform are assisting KKU with its e-learning vision. Most widely used capabilities are web conferencing for hosting virtual classrooms, the whiteboard for making classes more engaging and interactive, polling for answering questions, and instant messaging.

A feature that is particularly relevant to KKU's gender divided community is the ability to provide instant collaboration through the deployment of Blackboard Collaborate enterprise instant messaging. This has enabled students and teachers to work together in an informal "virtual venue," so they are able to chat, connect through video to have one-to-one interviews, and share their desktops with one another to exchange ideas; an enhancement to communication that happens naturally in the hallways, cafeterias, or libraries of a physical campus.

Over 7,000 students across 25 departments, including medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, computer sciences, engineering, education, Sharia and religion, training, and more are adopting online collaboration into their curriculum today.

The increase in adoption has been driven by their 'top–down' vision where instructors are comprehensively trained either face-to-face or more often, online. All of the content and training materials are published on the university's e-Learning Deanship website and e-learning specialists can be reached virtually to help students requiring assistance. Qatrawi adds, "Our training and marketing department are also doing a great job in marketing Blackboard Collaborate for online training."

Benefits

Blackboard Collaborate has helped KKU to overcome many of its challenges around enhancing the quality of education, improving access to teaching and resources, and helping to manage a gender divided campus. Additionally, the use of Blackboard Collaborate has helped to save the university and its students significant time and money. Studying can now be done remotely, thereby removing the major issues around travel and a gender-divided campus, as well as creating more equitable distribution of faculty talent across campuses. It also makes teaching more efficient as instructors only need to be in one place, reducing the number of trips to the campuses. KKU has even eliminated the need for establishing new studios, which has saved the university large sums of money.

Dr. Muhammad Habashi, associate professor says, "This interactive way of learning enhances students' learning motivation, their desire for continuous learning, and provides options to choose the most suitable learning style for each of them." His colleague, Dr Jihan Abulaziz, assistant professor, reports positive feedback from students in the virtual classroom in her e-courses and notes that students now take the initiative in the dialogue with the instructor. They absorb lessons away from the classroom and most importantly they achieve their goals much quicker.

Finally, by using Blackboard Collaborate, the university has been able to select some of the best faculty members available from around the world and the quality of instruction and student outcomes have improved. There are no longer shortages of qualified instructors for some of the courses and Qatrawi adds, "This semester we have more than ten courses that are taught by external instructors." The university has been able to make the most of its limited learning resources, many of which have been enriched through the addition of audio and video over the internet. And KKU now has remote lectures by industry experts and new political courses taught by instructors based in Cairo and the USA.

Looking to the future, one professor at KKU believes that the number of e-learning courses will increase alongside more efficient teaching and learning techniques and tools which will have a significant impact upon the university. "E-learning is the language of the future and any faculty member or student who lacks knowledge and skills is going to feel alienated and isolated from modern life."

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