

Notre Dame University - Louaize

ABOUT NDU

Notre Dame University - Louaize (NDU) is a leading Lebanese Catholic higher education institution. Originally founded in 1978 through a partnership between Beirut University College and the Maronite Order of the Holy Virgin, it became NDU in 1987.

Teaching using the American system of education, NDU operates on a non-sectarian and non-profit basis it has since grown to over 6,000 students and 574 faculty members, spread over 18 departments on three campuses across Lebanon.

All NDU programmes are underpinned with an ethos of life-long learning, as well as a strong emphasis on personal and professional ethics designed to stay with students throughout their careers. One of the reasons for NDU's growth and status is due to embracing technology in its delivery of a wide range of degrees; from health sciences to political sciences and liberal arts to computer engineering.

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Cutting edge technology: A competitive advantage

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As well as using Blackboard Learn to support face-to-face teaching, the software provided learning continuity under crisis conditions when the university was closed. Concerned about the interruption of studies NDU instructors and professors used Blackboard to maintain contact with students. Some of the teachers held discussions with students and set assignments during this time, which kept students more engaged and on track, minimising disruption.

As NDU has grown over the last decade, its requirements have changed and become more sophisticated. This meant that it needed to advance its VLE, to provide enhanced features, such as improved grading and assessment workflow management as well as embracing increased use of tools such as wikis and blogs.

Additionally, another longer-term objective in upgrading its learning management system (LMS) was the potential for developing e-learning programmes, which would serve to widen participation and enable many more students to learn with the university at a distance. Already running a very successful e-learning programme at certificate level, the aim is to extend this to both undergraduate and masters degrees. Pending approval of the concept from the Lebanese Ministry of Higher Education, NDU wants to be ready to embrace the opportunity when it comes. Therefore any new LMS would have to be able to quickly facilitate seamless collaboration and enable cohesive community support, and be ready to go once distance learning approval was granted by the Ministry for Education. This would effectively allow the university to compete on a global basis, increasing student numbers and consequently revenue, which could then be re-invested back into the institution.

Dependability and trust

While very satisfied with Blackboard Learn NDU carried out full research into other paid-for LMS and free open source

tools, however, NDU dismissed open source options, realising that these would still incur significant costs through the need for greater technical support. What the university needed was an integrated package that it could trust and depend upon, and that had an established presence in the region.

The university was clear that the original Blackboard Learn implementation had proved its worth in attracting and retaining the highest calibre of student. Dr. Fawzi Baroud, Director of IT and the University eLearning Centre says, “I believe Blackboard’s technology has a very positive effect on getting prospective students to join NDU. Every year we have the Open Doors event where high school students visit NDU and explore the University’s offerings and facilities specifically the IT department where they attend a Blackboard demo session, and this gives us an added value compared with other universities in Lebanon.

Strategy & Implementation

Given its positive experience and the full range of features offered within the latest version of the product, NDU therefore chose to remain with Blackboard, deploying a full migration to Blackboard Learn release 9.1. The combination of its existing good reputation, new modules and local presence made Blackboard the logical choice. The launch of Blackboard Learn release 9.1 has been very well received throughout NDU, both by students and staff who welcome the chance to use the new modules as an integral part of the learning experience.

Upgrading enabled the university to build on the knowledge it had already gained over a decade of Blackboard use. NDU’s professors were already using and making full use of Blackboard Learn’s integration tools and online assessment capabilities, and were keen to extend into other areas.

The new features integrated within Blackboard Learn release 9.1 matched NDU's expanding needs. NDU found that the latest version provides users a greater range of enhanced multimedia tools, particularly significantly improved assessment and grading management options to meet its key objectives in this area. Additionally it integrates new tools to manage blogs, wikis and detect plagiarism - with all students now submitting their work through Blackboard for automatic plagiarism checks.

Finally, NDU wanted to work with a partner with a significant local presence and Blackboard's dedicated Beirut office provides a high level of support to NDU and other users across the Middle East.

Looking forward

Looking forward NDU strongly believes that mobile technology is the future of education and is undergoing a major wireless network upgrade project to support this. Working with Blackboard enables NDU to examine the benefits for students and staff being able to access content whenever and wherever they are via their mobile devices. The institution is trialling Blackboard Mobile, which, as well as further enhancing the student experience, also facilitates greater peer-to-peer engagement and collaboration. Blackboard Mobile potentially offers NDU students and instructors mobile access to university services including course information, news and events, and key contact information, building an even stronger learning community. Blackboard Mobile would also prove key to underpinning distance teaching when NDU is granted permission to launch its e-learning programmes.

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Dr. Fawzi Baroud

in all of these aims. Also, given our experience and status as a regional technology champion, we are keen to help other institutions in the region to adopt the technology and reap its benefits."

For more information

If you want to learn more about how Blackboard can help increase the impact of education, please contact your account executive or visit: www.blackboard.com www.blackboard.com/learn

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