Engaging Prospective Students, Alumni, and Active Learners Using Blackboard Collaborate

George Brown College’s (GBC) administration is highly focused on reimagining and providing learner-centered experiences, as outlined in their Vision 2030, Strategy 2022 Plan. Consequently, a core component of the plan—the student’s digital experience—immediately became a top priority. For George Brown’s Digital Learning Environment (DLE) team, this translates into a heightened emphasis on providing students with a consistent, barrierless, and impactful digital experience—one that spans the complete student lifecycle.

As long-time users of Blackboard Learn, Blackboard’s learning management system, and Blackboard Collaborate, Blackboard’s virtual classroom tool, to power the digital aspects of teaching and learning, the DLE team chose to expand their use of the platform beyond supporting solely active students. “Collaborate provides us with a united space to engage prospective students, alumni, and active learners,” said Jimi Rockley, Digital Learning Coordinator at GBC.

According to Rockley, Blackboard Learn and Blackboard Collaborate enable them to:

- Offer one consistent student experience across courses, programs, and offerings
- Minimize the time required to train faculty and staff as even less tech-savvy users find it easy to use
- Eliminate the need for the additional step of downloading an app as Blackboard Collaborate is browser-based
- Simplify the hosting of meetings as the Blackboard Collaborate virtual room is always ready and session recordings are automatically posted for review
- Automate the taking of attendance

Location: Toronto, Canada
Students: 25,000
Blackboard Products:
Blackboard Learn
Blackboard Assist
Blackboard Collaborate
Blackboard Analytics for Learn
Blackboard Ally
Five years ago, GBC’s Domestic Student Recruitment team had an idea—to live stream campus tours for those prospective students unable to visit GBC in person. Rockley immediately proposed using Blackboard Collaborate.

Rockley and his colleague, Miguel Roman, System Administrator at GBC, expanded on their choice of Blackboard Collaborate by sharing that it is simple, clean, and easy for people to use. “Blackboard is a solution we knew our small team could get up, running, and integrated easily and largely out-of-the-box—this would not have been possible with any other provider,” shares Roman. “We are a small team, yet we manage to accomplish a lot thanks to the depth and quality of Blackboard’s products, APIs, documentation, and support.”

Powering Virtual Campus Tours

Five years ago, GBC’s Domestic Student Recruitment team had an idea—to live stream campus tours for those prospective students unable to visit GBC in person. Rockley immediately proposed using Blackboard Collaborate.

“The idea was to be able to give prospective students not just exposure to the campus, but also exposure to some of the tools they will use once on campus,” explains Rockley.

– Jimi Rockley, Digital Learning Coordinator, George Brown College.

The Domestic Student Recruitment team has since expanded their use of Blackboard Collaborate to offer various prospective student information sessions ranging from “How to Finance Post-Secondary Education” to “How to Apply as an Adult Learner.” These sessions are consistently well attended, with anywhere from 10 to more than 275 attendees per session.

When the pandemic hit, the team was well-prepared to meet the needs of prospective students with these established virtual sessions. Plus, they added a virtual question and answer session to field college application and program questions and quickly pivoted all campus tours to online-only events using Blackboard Collaborate. These tours featured photo presentations of GBC’s campus spaces, pre-recorded video, and live discussions—offering prospective students a clear sense of campus life without being physically on campus.

Supporting Online Career Fairs

When Michelle Hahn from GBC’s Industry Liaison Office (ILO) expressed interest in hosting an online Centre for Construction and Engineering Technology Technologies (CCET) career fair, Rockley again turned to Blackboard Collaborate as the tool of choice. Historically GBC’s day-long career fairs were held in a large hall with numerous companies represented and hundreds of students asking similar questions and dropping off paper resumes.

Inspired by his attendance at the virtual BbWorld conference a few months earlier, Rockley decided to leverage Blackboard Learn and Blackboard Collaborate to build a three-day career fair. Together, Rockley and Hahn created a framework that offered specific times for each company to present, created reminders to prompt students to
attend, made sharing company information with students straightforward, and created folders so students could electronically submit their resumes.

In this new model, employers invested only thirty minutes of their time (rather than a full day), and students got the information they needed more effectively. Plus, when it came time for an interview, students had complete access to the company’s recorded session and materials, which helped them prepare.

The CCET and ILO team were delighted with the turnout of this virtual career fair as there were:

- 28 industry partners that presented
- 2,116 resumes submitted
- An average of 75 students in each live session, totaling 2,460 live-event visits
- A total of 653 students attending the entire event

Expanding Alumni Services

GBC’s Alumni Relations team has promoted career pathways at the college through training and education using Blackboard Collaborate since as far back as 2017. Today, the team is using Blackboard Collaborate to deliver webinars and host employer panels for GBC’s more than 300,000 alumni.

The Alumni Services team is using Blackboard Collaborate to engage alumni with:

- Webinars on topics like resume building and interviewing skills
- Virtual panels featuring GBC graduates and employers
- Virtual speakers on hiring graduates with disabilities
- Virtual sessions on staying positive and motivated during the pandemic

“When these programs offer a great service to our alumni that have helped us in our efforts to engage alumni in meaningful, useful ways,” says Rockley.

Delivering the President’s Town Halls

When GBC’s President, Dr. Anne Sado, wants to communicate with GBC’s faculty and staff, she too uses Blackboard Collaborate. These president-hosted town halls are invaluable means of disseminating information across GBC, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. Blackboard Collaborate was selected to support these events due to its ease of use, as well as to demonstrate GBC’s commitment to using the same solutions faculty are expected to use when teaching.
The Overall Result: An Enhanced Digital Student Experience

GBC’s ability to utilize the Blackboard platform successfully and efficiently has enabled them to:

- Strengthen the student’s digital experience
- Expand their reach beyond current students to include prospective students and alumni
- Optimize their technology investment
- Maximize the efficiency of their DLE team

“We chose Blackboard because it is a mature product. Blackboard offers GBC a learning ecosystem whereby all of our students—across all departments, no matter where they live—can learn and share in meaningful and impactful ways,”

– Jimi Rockley, Digital Learning Coordinator, George Brown College.

Looking Ahead to Data and Accessibility

GBC’s next step in advancing the student digital experience is to focus on using Blackboard Data and Blackboard Analytics for Learn to identify at-risk students more clearly. They will also be focusing on their use of Blackboard Ally as a component of their plan to improve the accessibility of course content.