

Blackboard



[www.nsu.edu](http://www.nsu.edu)  
Norfolk, VA  
5,000+ students

## Driving student success with Blackboard Collaborate for web conferencing and virtual classrooms: from career services to financial aid and beyond

It started with a vision. Norfolk State University’s (NSU) Office of Extended Learning/NSU Online wanted to provide accessible alternatives to both faculty and students to communicate and engage from a distance, as well as on campus. The university wanted to transform the way it did business—to deliver real-time sharing of information, improve Institutional accountability, and create an ongoing presence—by leveraging its investment in Blackboard Collaborate. NSU’s laser focus on promoting student success not only resulted in happier students and staff, but also paved the way for significant program growth.

### Growing “gains”

Like many institutions, Norfolk State University created its Extended Learning organization as a means of expanding its geographic footprint virtually. Quickly on the heels of its inception, it became evident that even nearby residential students also desired flexible learning options, and the program grew by leaps and bounds.

Initially, there was a need to provide virtual office hours to students, especially those enrolled in online programs. Faculty also expressed a need to provide a tool that would allow students to collaborate in the online environment while enhancing engagement.

Increased course enrollment also meant an increased need for student support, ranging from admissions advice to financial aid counseling to technical support, and more. Rather than being daunted by these ripple effects of growth, NSU took a pragmatically innovative approach: to find a solution that could be utilized throughout the entire university.

80%

of NSU students,  
faculty, and  
staff regularly  
use Blackboard  
Collaborate



*“Blackboard Collaborate has enabled us to reach a population of students with our workshops that we haven’t been able to in the past due to employment conflicts or distance learners not being on campus.”*

**Brianna Clark**

Assistant Director of Career Services, NSU

## **Weighing options**

For NSU, a campus-wide solution required campus-wide buy-in. “We needed to weigh the pros and cons of each prospective solution from the perspectives of our constituents,” says Shelley Scott-Johnson, Assistant Director, Programs of the Office of Extended Learning/NSU Online. “I also saw this as an opportunity to think beyond just traditional online classroom use—and not only increase collaboration between faculty and students, but also enhance the entire NSU student experience.”

The Extended Learning department formed a core team comprised of stakeholders from across the university, including Disability Services, Library, Spartan Student Success, Faculty, Administrators, and Digital Faculty Fellows. After evaluating several options, including the incumbent Adobe Connect and Blue Jeans, the decision was unanimous: to make the move to Blackboard Collaborate. Collaborate’s ease of use, browser-based delivery, and integration within Blackboard Learn made it the obvious choice for students, faculty, and staff alike.

## **A creative use of (virtual) space**

A request from students who didn’t want to cross campus late at night gave Scott-Johnson the idea to create virtual study group rooms. “We marketed it to students as a way to collaborate on group projects, enabled them to ‘reserve’ rooms online, and provided them with resources on how to use the tools,” offers Scott-Johnson.



She was then inspired to reach out to her peers across campus, to explore how they too might utilize Collaborate within their departments as well. It wasn't long before students and faculty were experiencing a difference in their daily lives. Today, they can use Collaborate to engage with:



**Career Services**, for virtual resume workshops, career planning, networking, and mock interviews



**Student Services**, for transfer support and personalized registration assistance



**Admissions**, for new student orientations and communications, as well as intra-departmental meetings when recruiting staff are on the road



**Office of Extended Learning**, for virtual Blackboard technical assistance, workshops, faculty development and training, new student orientation, and NSU Online Information Sessions



**Financial Aid**, for loan counseling and “off hours” support

*“Blackboard Collaborate provides a multi-dimensional approach to collaboration and engagement. It is very easy to use, has mobile capabilities, and a multitude of uses besides inside the classroom. It is truly more than a course tool and I highly recommend it.”*

**Shelley Scott-Johnson**  
Assistant Director,  
Programs of the Office  
of Extended Learning/  
NSU Online

Enrollment, graduation and retention results are on the rise at NSU, thanks to the concerted effort and enhanced support the university offers students. “This tool allows us to connect with students outside of the typical 8 am to 5 pm timeframe,” explains Kesha Wilson, Transfer Liaison and Financial Aid Counselor with NSU. “It has also permitted us to host Financial Aid presentations to students virtually while providing the same great customer service and assistance we provide in face-to-face interactions.”

## Key features of Collaborate

- Ease of LTI integration with Blackboard Learn
- Browser-based, no downloads required
- Streamlined and easy-to-use interface
- Mobile accessible via Bb Student
- Cost-effective
- File and application sharing with real-time annotation
- HD audio and video
- Ease of creating sessions
- Interactive Whiteboard
- “Follow the speaker” feature

## Ensuring success

Scott-Johnson attributes the university’s 80 percent adoption rate to a well-rounded training and support program. The Office of Extended Learning offers:

- Virtual conferences held using Collaborate
- Virtual and on-campus office hours
- A suite of online self-serve and how-to guides
- In-person conferences with demonstrations and hands-on training

“Although Collaborate is very intuitive, I’ve found that it helps to provide a little hand-holding to truly ensure success using the tools,” adds Scott-Johnson. NSU also extended mobile use of Collaborate using the Blackboard app to ensure that students could stay connected while on the go.

## Achieving excellence

NSU continues to exemplify excellence, the top university core value in a short list that also includes being student-centered and driving engagement. The university is at work developing ten new online and certificate programs with “career pathways” in mind, engaging students, faculty, local employers, and the community at large in the selection process.

With a solid infrastructure in place, NSU faculty and the Office of Extended Learning are able to focus on the university’s innovative vision for the future.

To access the Blackboard Collaborate free trial, visit  
**[Blackboard.com/collabtrial](https://blackboard.com/collabtrial)**