

The Five Critical Elements of a Collaboration Solution for Education

A GUIDE FOR ACADEMIC TECHNOLOGISTS
AND CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICERS

Online learning today increasingly involves live, virtual-classroom delivery, as well as opportunities for non-classroom collaboration. To support the synchronous interactions that are becoming more and more vital in the learning community, those charged with deploying real-time online learning and collaboration are able to choose from a wide array of technology options. All these options are not created equal, however. In this white paper, Blackboard lays out the elements that academic technologists and chief academic officers should take into consideration when assessing the different solutions available to them. It describes the generic capabilities that cover the basics, and, more importantly, discusses the capabilities and attributes specific to an educational setting that may not be present in a web conferencing system designed for the general-purpose meetings. Blackboard's goal in this paper is to help its readers understand the distinctions between general-purpose conferencing systems, and solutions that were designed to meet the needs of academic institutions, and to better equip readers as they evaluate the systems offered to them.

Online learning and collaboration enthusiasm runs high

Virtual, blended, real-time, self-paced, collaborative: much of today's learning happens online. In its November 2010 report, *Class Differences: Online Education in the United States, 2010*, the Babson Survey Research Group's Sloan Consortium reported on the widespread use and acceptance of online education in the United States. Over 2,500 colleges and universities participated in the survey, and the results illustrate the extent of learning online:

- ▶ In the Fall of 2009, over 5.6 million students, representing nearly thirty percent of students in higher education, took at least one online course
- ▶ While, overall, the student population in higher education had grown by only two percent over the prior year, class enrollment for online learners swelled by twenty-one percent

We initially [used Blackboard Collaborate] to save time by holding meetings online but we expanded courses too. One of our instructors conducted a two-year survey and found that courses that were taught online with a synchronous component had a higher retention rate, success rate, persistence rate, and students earned more A's and B's.

Blaine Morrow
Project Director of CCC Confer
and 3C Media Solutions of
Palomar College.



Some of this growth can be attributed to the economic climate, which has heightened demand for more cost-effective course delivery. It's also a function of the globalization of education, with colleges and universities taking advantage of the ability to enroll overseas students. The success of online, private for-profit institutions is also a factor here. And underlying the growing interest in online learning is the coming of age of the "always on" generation. Technically fluent and completely comfortable in an online environment, learning online is a logical extension of how students live their lives.

Colleges and universities are rapidly coming to terms with the online learning phenomenon. Of the institutions in the Babson survey, sixty-three percent indicated that online learning is a critical element in their long-term strategy. Interestingly, an online strategic intent is not confined to public universities pressured to do more with less, or to for-profit institutions looking to expand their reach and profitability. While nearly three-quarters of public colleges and universities, and slightly over sixty percent of private for-profit institutions consider online learning strategic, over one-half of private colleges – traditionally more conservative in their approach – now cite online as of strategic importance.

One reason that online learning is growing in importance is that it works. In the Sloan Consortium's recent survey, just under two-thirds of all respondents said that they believe that online learning is "at least as good", if not superior, to comparable face-to-face courses.

Against the backdrop of more online courses being taken, and more instructors augmenting face-to-face learning with online elements, two key shifts stand out. One is the emerging importance of synchronous learning, in which the self-paced, asynchronous modes so well supported by Learning Management Systems (LMS) are augmented by capabilities that allow instructors and learners to interact in real-time, with all the opportunities for give and take, and for providing feedback, that a physical classroom provides. A second factor impacting learning is that today's students go online to collaborate on team assignments and special projects, and to meet in informal study groups – necessary preparation for participation in the global, fast-paced, and fully connected workplace. These days, online learning is no longer synonymous with self-paced or distance learning. Sometimes it means collaborating with a fellow-student in the dorm next door, or with a faculty member sitting in their office.

For colleges and universities that have embraced online learning and collaboration, enthusiasm runs high. Paige Brooks-Jeffiers is the Distance Learning Coordinator for the Kentucky Community College and Technical College system. "It's exciting to watch the acceptance of online collaboration grow as early adopters provide more exposure to those who may have been more

cautious,” she has noted. “Every time someone has another positive collaboration experience, they begin to think about new ways it can help them succeed and deliver on their mission.”

Online learning also enriches the traditional classroom experience. At the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Mark Burris, Director of Scholarly Technology found that, “the ability for faculty and students to collaborate in real-time breathes new life into the online classroom by giving aural and kinesthetic learners what they have needed for years, a synchronous learning experience. What has surprised me the most is that faculty who teach in a traditional classroom are discovering that they can better leverage its asynchronous tools to extend learning beyond the time-and-space limits of the traditional classroom. Through the archive and file download features, students are able to benefit exponentially from repeated interaction with content and collaborative experiences.”

The bottom line is that the technological developments of the past two decades are shifting the concept of learning. Learning is no longer viewed solely through the lens of what is formally delivered by the institution. Today’s learning is being redefined to encompass the notion of student-centricity, personalization, and enrichment that goes well beyond what was available in yesterday’s “talk and chalk” classroom.

Given the importance of collaboration and synchronous online learning, it’s not surprising that a broad array of technology offerings have emerged to support it. Those charged with implementing online learning are faced with sorting through freeware designed for low-cost, no-cost overseas calls; “comes with” applications provided by desktop technology providers; commercially-oriented systems originally designed for sales presentations or corporate meetings; and solutions that were built from the ground up to meet the needs of educational institutions. Sifting through long feature-lists, trying to discern what matters and what is less important, can be a formidable process.

In this white paper, our purpose is to lay out a framework to assist those responsible for evaluating and selecting a synchronous online learning and collaboration system that supports today’s enriched learning environment – an environment which relies on both synchronous and asynchronous delivery, rich media, and real-time, multi-way communications. This framework is derived from Blackboard’s long and deep

experience in providing online solutions to the learning community. Since 1997, Blackboard has been providing enterprise technology and innovative solutions that improve the experience of millions of students and learners around the world every day. Blackboard’s solutions allow thousands of higher education, K-12, professional, corporate, and government organizations to extend teaching and learning online, facilitate campus commerce and security, and communicate more effectively with their communities.

Blackboard is solely focused on learning. We pride ourselves on our expertise in this arena, and the close relationships we hold with our customers, who continually share with us the benefit of their expertise as we enhance our existing solutions and define new ones. Our work is rooted in our passion for using technology to improve the learning experience by engaging students in new and exciting ways that evolve as the technology, and our understanding of how different individuals learn, continues to evolve.

This paper will cover system fundamentals that can (and should) be expected, whatever technology is chosen. It then presents the critical elements of a synchronous online learning and collaboration system that can meet the unique and broad spectrum of needs found in an educational setting.

Beyond the basics

There are a number of core components that are part of any good synchronous collaboration system. These are the fundamental, largely generic capabilities that make online learning and collaboration possible. These core capabilities include:

- ▶ **Multiple-communications mechanisms: VoIP, teleconferencing, multi-point video, instant messaging and chat**
- ▶ **The ability to incorporate live, multi-way audio and video**
- ▶ **Rich content use, including Office applications, multimedia, such as video clips, and web-based “tours”**
- ▶ **Application, desktop, and website sharing**
- ▶ **Tools for interactivity, such as whiteboards, surveys, polling**
- ▶ **Participant awareness, i.e., knowledge of who’s there**
- ▶ **Controlled access, restricted to legitimate participants**

These are the basics. While full collaboration systems will have all of these capabilities, not all products built for conferencing will. Conferencing systems were typically built for simple meetings that involve presenting PowerPoint slides and

I'm proud to say that Blackboard Collaborate truly seems to understand the importance of its customers' voices. I've had the honor of participating in numerous meetings about its next-generation product and am heartened by the fact that its product development team puts so much stock into its customers' thoughts, experience, and opinions. For a company that advocates the value of creating meaningful online engagement, I can say with the utmost certainty that Blackboard Collaborate practices what it preaches.

Val Brooks
Deputy Director,
Stockton City Learning Centre.

talking about them. Even though there may be some opportunities for interaction – such as asking a question through a formal mechanism or through chat – conferencing products were not built for true engagement. Attempts to retro-fit them for the demands of online learning and collaboration may result in systems that don't feel organic, are cumbersome to use and don't provide instructors the robust teaching aids and moderation controls they need.

While true collaboration systems will all provide the basics, long experience in the online learning and collaboration world strongly suggests that, while the basics may be necessary, they prove insufficient to carry out an educational mission. This mission requires that online learning must not be “good enough”, but must be first-rate, and yield the engagement, satisfaction, and educational outcomes experienced in a traditional, face-to-face environment.

Through its work with thousands of educational institutions over the years, and the “in-house” knowledge that comes from staff members who are experienced educators, Blackboard has identified five critical elements of a collaboration solution that's used in an educational environment. In our experience, such as solution must:

- ▶ **Be designed for education (by educators)**
- ▶ **Meet the accessibility imperative**
- ▶ **Provide seamless access to learning**
- ▶ **Engage the audience**
- ▶ **Ensure that strategic goals are met**

Designed for Educators by Educators

While the fundamental things apply whether a collaboration system is being used for educational or general corporate purposes (online meetings, presentations), there remains a critical distinction between those two purposes. Corporations focus on building and selling products and services, on growing their business, on making profits. Employees may be essential to fulfilling a corporation's mission, but they are not the central element of that mission, nor are they the corporation's reason for being. In contrast, for those whose mission is educational, student success is the mission. Because of this, there are many points at which the needs of an educational institution will diverge from those of a corporation. This holds whether that educational institution is private, public, or profit-making. Indeed, when it comes to the learning function, it holds for the corporation, as well.

This mission difference and needs divergence calls for those charged with managing online learning and collaboration to pay serious attention to the presence of education-specific capabilities when evaluating collaboration systems. Increasingly, those investing in such systems recognize that a solution that was designed for education, with guidance from educators, will best meet their needs.

“A system built for online learning will overlap in a number of ways with a web conferencing product. In fact, it will likely include all core web conferencing features. But in order to let instructors truly engage with students, online learning technology has to stretch far beyond the capabilities needed to run a business group meeting or conduct an informational presentation,” said Lee McGinn, Instructional Development Coordinator,

at South Carolina's Greenville Technical College. "That's why it's so essential for educators to have input into the development of an online learning solution. We know what it's like to stand in front of a classroom, so we understand what needs to be done to keep students alert, involved, and to assess learning outcomes. And that's fundamentally different from what it takes to get a sales presentation across."

A universal requirement among educators is the desire to have an online learning environment that replicates the control, spontaneity and student interaction they enjoy in face-to-face learning. One capability that helps facilitate this is the ability to easily set up student breakout sessions. Robust breakout rooms let instructors - on-the-fly - assign students to different groups, save and move content across rooms or to the main classroom, and drop in and out of breakout sessions to see how groups are progressing with assignments, broadcast a message to all groups, and display a timer.

Instructors need to be in charge of their classes whether they're held in desk-and-chair classrooms or virtually. A system built for educators will factor this in, providing instructors with the ability to assign specific permissions to individual students, allowing them to chat, write on the whiteboard, or roam among breakout sessions. Most importantly, the solution should enable instructors to "see" what students are doing - writing on the whiteboard, speaking, chatting, laughing, raising a hand, stepping out - and when they are technically lagging (behind due to constrained bandwidth).

Sometimes it's the smaller details that spell the difference between effective teaching and collaboration, and teaching that doesn't quite measure up. Features that educators prize include the ability to conduct voice discussion in their classes, to post voice feedback to student assignments, to manage class flow by setting timers, and to establish and queue up online office hours. A system designed for education should not forget about the students, either. They are, after all, the principal focus of the educational mission. An ideal student-oriented feature (well-suited for both the classroom and for general collaboration sessions) is the ability for students to take personalized notes, synchronized to the recording of the session.

Finally, course content with interactive activities, created in advance of class delivery, should be packaged so that instructors can easily navigate among different elements of their delivery. E.g., an instructor should be able to move from a slide to application sharing without having to hunt for icons to make the switch. This enables the instructor to focus on teaching, not on technology. Pre-packaged courses also allow for consistency in course content and delivery across instructors. While this is important, instructors also need to have the flexibility to be able to make a "mid-course correction" based on class interest and teachable moments. Those evaluating collaboration systems must always keep in mind that the function of a general-purpose collaboration system is informational; the function of an online learning and collaboration system is educational.



“

With all its features, Blackboard Collaborate is the way of the future. I have become closer to my students with this format than in my 25 previous years teaching in a traditional classroom.

Paige Brooks-Jeffers,
Distance Learning Coordinator,
Kentucky Community College
& Technical College System

”

“

Blackboard Collaborate, coupled with our course management system and other software, is transforming the way we do business.

Allen Taylor
CTO, Marshall University

”



Meeting the accessibility imperative

It's estimated that nearly 20% of the U.S. population have some type of disability, and face visual, aural, mobility and cognitive challenges. For colleges and universities, supporting students, faculty, and administrators with disabilities holds meaning beyond the legal requirements set by Federal mandates such as the Americans with Disabilities Act. For reasons of decency and fairness, and for overall societal benefit as well, it becomes an imperative part of the educational mission.

Most educational institutions have a profound commitment to those with disabilities, and technology is making a major difference for them. Carin Headrick is an independent accessibility consult who herself has a visual disability. "Ten years ago, we couldn't have dreamed of the potential. New technology makes things amazingly easier—as long as it's made accessible."

Debbie Faires, Assistant Director for Distance Learning, School of Library and Information Science, San Jose State University, underscores Headrick's message on the role of technology. "Whether it's distance learning or in the classroom, technology is impacting how learning gets done. If there are any barriers, individuals with disabilities can't access the education they want and deserve."

Online learning and collaboration is one arena that holds particular promise for those with disabilities, and there are a number of ways in which learning online can be superior to face-to-face classroom style learning. Educational institutions evaluating collaboration solutions need to make sure that the vendors they are working with are as committed to answering the accessibility imperative as they themselves are, and are working to tear down any barriers to learning that those with disabilities face. As Faires continued, "I can't overstate the role of awareness – how important it is technology vendors to be aware of barriers and issues. If they're aware, they can address those needs."

There are a number of ways in which an online learning solution must meet the needs that Faires mentions, and eliminate barriers to use. These include:

- ▶ **Screen reader support: text-to-speech output for menus, dialog boxes, slides, participant information and chat**
- ▶ **Scaling of content areas**
- ▶ **Inheritance of color and contrast settings**
- ▶ **Ability to hide non-essential features**
- ▶ **Closed captioning support (saved in recordings)**
- ▶ **Keyboard navigation and accelerator keys for menus, navigation, and common functions**
- ▶ **Indexed recordings for replay**
- ▶ **Breakout rooms, private chat, synchronized notes**



In 2009, Blackboard Collaborate, formalized the process of including those with direct experience with, or as, individuals with disabilities in its development efforts, and created a task force composed of those involved with accessibility support in colleges and universities, many of them disabled themselves. Independent accessibility consultant Carin Headrick has this to say about that effort.

Because we live our disability, we know how we can give feedback about what works and what doesn't. It's all well and good to design something with the best of intentions, but sometimes that results in a partial solution that's not really a solution at all. I really appreciate that Blackboard Collaborate initiated their process for hearing from people with disabilities, not just relying on their version of what they think should be a workable solution.



Fuller detail on the features essential to an online learning and collaboration solution designed to meet the needs of those who are disabled is available in the white paper No User Left Behind: Blackboard Collaborate and the Accessibility Imperative.

While much of the focus of the accessibility imperative is on those with physical and cognitive disabilities, there are other populations with accessibility demands. These include students who are geographically distant from institutions of higher learning, who are likely in areas with low bandwidth connections to the Internet. Distance learning provides a tremendous option for these students. To meet their needs, educational institutions should consider how a collaboration solution handles those with low bandwidth. Whether they have a disability or live in a remote area under-served by the Internet, no user should be left behind.

Provide seamless access to learning

Instructors do more than “just” stand and deliver in a physical or virtual classroom, and they typically use a Learning Management System (LMS) and/or a Content Management System (CMS) to support them in tasks such as class scheduling, roster management, grading, managing assignments, and course creation. They also use other applications – wikis, blogs, event-scheduling systems. Instructors need a tightly integrated environment in which to operate among the myriad systems they rely on. For starters, they must be able to seamlessly navigate between real-time capabilities provided through an online learning and collaboration system, such

as web conferencing and instant messaging, and the off-line capabilities of an LMS.

An LMS plays a critical foundational roll with respect to online learning, and for many educators the LMS has become the workspace for many of their outside-the-classroom activities. Being able to move directly from their familiar LMS into a web conferencing solution to take care of the synchronous aspects of course delivery is an essential element of an online learning system.

Instant messaging (IM) is an important collaboration tool. An IM utility embedded in an online learning and collaboration system should be able to pull student information, identifying those who are part of the class and, thus, have permission to IM. This capability lets instructors securely control and manage their virtual classroom.

An educator-oriented collaboration solution must also provide instructors with streamlined access to all the asynchronous course content they've built, and to be able to automatically populate class rosters from their LMS. From within their online learning system, instructors should be able to voice-annotate their LMS pages. They should be able to record homework assignments, add new “after thoughts”, and underscore discussion points. Instructors should also be able to provide one-on-one feedback on student assignments, and add comments to their grade books. (Aural feedback is especially useful for foreign language classes.)

We support Blackboard Collaborate's continued vision of openness and are pleased they are providing us integration with their solutions no matter what system we choose.

Dr. David. J. Ayersman
Chief Information Officer, New River
Community and Technical College

In addition to supporting the needs of instructors, an online learning and collaboration system must be able to “support the supporters” – the online learning administrators and the IT staff charged with deploying and managing learning technology in their institution. To this end, those evaluating online learning solutions should look for out-of-the-box connectors to popular LMS's. There are many LMS offerings on the market, including Blackboard, ANGEL, Moodle, Sakai, Pearson, Desire2Learn,, and Fronter. With built in integration, online learning administrators will be able to seamlessly take care of the behind the scenes tasks that facilitate instructors – setting up accounts, managing IDs, and scheduling events. And with close integration, IT departments won't have to devote their scarce resources to customization.

Many colleges and universities use multiple LMS and CMS systems for different purposes, on different campuses, and for “schools within the school”. Because of this, an online learning and collaboration system should be able to comfortably integrate with more than one LMS/CMS system, so that instructors can navigate back and forth without having to make cumbersome switches. To support the needs of IT, a collaboration system should also provide an open application programming interface so that they can easily integrate with less standard applications). Vendors should also offer integration services, especially for those institutions with a homegrown or less common LMS.

Having an online learning/collaboration solution that can easily and tightly integrate with many other systems yields a number of important benefits. In addition to IT time and cost savings on installation, implementation and ongoing support, an integrated, streamlined system translates into time (and aggravation) savings for instructors and a more satisfying and richer learning experience for students. Well integrated systems are easier to use. They provide a familiar environment, one that requires less new user, and which eliminates the need for multiple (irksome) logins.

Overall, synergy among different systems also means that an institution will be able to derive more use from their learning platforms, as adding synchronous collaboration capabilities to an LMS expands usage and by expanding learning modalities offered, results in better outcomes.. As a result, institutions can expect a stronger and shorter return on investment. The bottom line: an online learning and collaboration system that is closely integrated with Learning Management and Content Management Systems makes life simpler and easier for all end users: instructors, administrators, IT, and students alike.

Engaging the audience

Tell me, I'll forget. Show me, I'll remember. Involve me, I'll understand.

When understanding is the desired outcome, online learning – whether in a virtual classroom, as an augment to in-person classroom instruction, or collaborative project-based – requires engaging the student. This is especially so today, when students are tech savvy and, as digital natives, demand it – or you risk losing them. And incorporating new and engaging media into the learning process can improve educational outcomes in both virtual learning environments and in a traditional classroom setting.

At the University of Utah, Linda Ralston of the Technology Assisted Curriculum Center found that “students who watch archives tend to have 24% higher grades on course quizzes and final exams than students who only utilized alternative PowerPoint slides with no audio. That's the difference between earning an ‘A’ in my class versus earning a ‘C.’ That's a significant difference.”

Wright State University (WSU) research shows that students who attend distance education classes that incorporate Blackboard Collaborate complete their courses at a 12% higher rate than students who attend exclusively face-to-face courses – a jump from 79% to 91%. WSU also finds that collaborative online courses enhance a sense of community by as much as 10%.

Traditional Distance Education classes that are text-based can result in students feeling alone and isolated, resulting in a higher drop-out rate,” says Sheri Stover, CTL Instructional Designer at Wright State. “Blackboard Collaborate gives faculty and students the opportunity to interact in real-time and build a strong sense of community, which results in higher completion rates, increased satisfaction, and deeper learning.

To secure results like those that Linda Ralston observed at the University of Utah, an online learning and collaboration system must be able to actively and continually engage its audience.

What’s needed to engage today’s learners? More than a passive, text-based delivery system, that’s for certain.

To provide effective learning, an online learning and collaboration system must support not just a rich array of media, including audio and video, it must provide opportunities for heightened interactivity – with students allowed to go “hands-on”. Writing on the whiteboard should not just be the province of an instructor. Just as pupils were once called to the blackboard, students should be able to be called to the virtual whiteboard to make their points and illustrate their ideas, or even all mark it up at the same time. Shared workspaces with equal and open access to a toolset are also important for experiential learning. Documents such as PowerPoint slide decks should not be static, but must be able to be manipulated in real-time, moving objects and bullets around as needed. In synchronous mode, students and instructors should be able to communicate through voice and chat. Today’s students communicate through text – sometimes even when they’re sitting next to the person they’re texting with. Built-in support for texting within an online learning and collaboration system is rapidly becoming an essential feature. In asynchronous learning situations, voice commentary must be supported.

A collaboration solution must offer a wide spectrum of operating modes, supporting formal and informal gatherings; synchronous and asynchronous learning; in-classroom, extra-classroom, and virtual classroom; and one-way and multi-way communication.

Ideally the collaboration solution makes it easy for users to move easily along this spectrum of collaboration as level of interaction and context changes.

Students need a vibrant, engaging, and flexible environment in which to learn. This same environment makes administrative meetings and faculty collaboration not just possible, but effective, too.

Ensuring that strategic goals are met

Technology 101 dictates that, before any system is implemented, it’s essential to have thought through the goals for that system. Surprisingly, in their determination to satisfy a checklist item and get something (anything) done, some organizations short cut this critical part of the process. With so many colleges and universities indicating that online learning is a key element in their strategic portfolio, it’s important that the online learning and collaboration system being deployed is closely aligned with an institution’s overall goals.

“Many times when you implement new technology solutions you have great ideas of how those tools and processes should work but due to limited time and budget constraints and other challenges you're never able to realize those initial goals. Blackboard Collaborate's Implementation Services allow you to retain focus on the goals, guide you through the steps necessary to reach those goals, and celebrate with you each step of the way.”

Kara Monroe,
Assistant Vice Provost,
Center for Instructional Technology,
Ivy Tech Community College



Vendors offering online learning and collaboration solutions should have professional service staff that can help define how collaboration fits in with an institution's strategy, identify the needs and desired outcomes for a collaboration system, and help ensure that those needs are met.

Goals. Strategies. Needs. These will differ from one organization to the next. One college may want to increase enrollment by widening its geographic reach and making courses available to those who work full-time. A university may have a commitment to serving students who are members of the military, deployed overseas, as does Marshall University, which offers military students anytime access to Marshall classes. Yet another may want to provide opportunities for remote, rural learners. Some colleges are experimenting with low cost virtual study abroad. The University of North Texas uses online learning to expand the number of courses it can offer. Many colleges and universities are looking to enhance the classroom experience by offering students recorded, annotated sessions for the classes they might have missed, or wish to review. And in today's economy, practically all are looking to contain costs and bring in new sources of revenue through additional programs and student enrollments.

Whatever its goals and needs, it's essential that a vendor have professionals on staff who can help craft and implement an online learning strategy. Ideally, these professionals will have a background in, and demonstrated commitment to, education. Sometimes this will be evidenced by having an advanced degree in education, or experience in a college or university environment. They should also have good business sense and a solid understanding of systems implementation. With these attributes, they can go well beyond the technical points of a system, and help identify use cases on the educational side, and opportunities for cost savings on the business side.

The core functions that a solid professional services team can assist with during the implementation process include:

- ▶ **Working with campus leaders to determine the institution's educational and administrative needs**
- ▶ **Developing pathways to meet these needs**
- ▶ **Identifying, alongside faculty and support staff, real-world use cases that are aligned to the institution's goals, and which have measurable objectives**
- ▶ **Tailoring deployment and training to meet specific requirements.**
- ▶ **Establishing processes that will enable an institution to repeatedly measure outcomes against metrics that are meaningful to an institution**

The right services help ensure that the online learning and collaboration solution adopted is the right fit. Internal champions will emerge, adoption will be increased, and the mechanisms will be in place that will help ensure that an institution's goals will be identified, taken into account, and met.

Mission Critical

For an increasing number of colleges and universities, online learning and collaboration is mission critical. Implementing a solution that is built for educators; helps meet the accessibility imperative; supports both instructors and IT; engages the audience; and can ensure that strategic goals are met makes this mission possible. Not all collaboration solutions are the same. Make the right choice for your institution, and you can achieve results like the ones that these college and universities have with Blackboard Collaborate:

- ▶ **IDEAL-New Mexico is a statewide eLearning initiative that uses web conferencing for online training seminars, annually saving \$1.5 million on hotel expenses, gas, and other travel-related expenses.**
- ▶ **Troy University was able to grow online enrollments by 12.9% in a single year, compared to a 1.2% overall growth in the higher education student population**
- ▶ **West Virginia University held live, virtual recruitment seminars, increasing out-of-area applications, and converting 40% of those who attended an online recruitment session**
- ▶ **University of Utah reduced spend per student by 42% (from \$195 to \$115) by offering hybrid Spanish language courses**

Read more about this in our ROI whitepaper series, including Improve Student Outcomes with Blackboard Collaborate, Increase Enrollment and Retention Rates with Blackboard Collaborate, and Save Time and Money with Blackboard Collaborate.

Blackboard focuses exclusively on the education market. This enables us to provide services that both cover the basics and, more important, see to it that the specific requirements of colleges and universities are met. Blackboard Collaborate was designed based on the five elements that are critical to a synchronous collaboration solution built for educational institutions.

To learn more about how you can reach your academic, administrative, and financial goals through more interactive and cost-effective collaboration, visit blackboardcollaborate.com, contact us at collaboratesales@blackboard.com, or try our solution free for 30 days at bbcollaborate.com/try.

BEYOND THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

With Blackboard Collaborate, colleges and universities go well beyond the virtual classroom walls. They're using web-conferencing for:

- ▶ Administrative meetings
- ▶ Faculty professional development
- ▶ Office hours
- ▶ School services
- ▶ Student team projects
- ▶ Collaborative faculty research
- ▶ IT support
- ▶ Recruitment seminars for new students
- ▶ Virtual field trips
- ▶ Global classroom-to-classroom connection
- ▶ Guest lectures and events

