

Lecture Capture Maximizes Investment at Marshall University

Heading into 2010, Marshall University (MU) in Huntington, West Virginia had some pretty lofty goals. After enjoying a decade of excellence as one of the country's leading public universities in terms of breadth of online course offerings, MU's leadership knew it needed to push even further ahead.

After all, the university had just seen an 11.2% leap in enrollments in 2009 and then received an astounding 40% increase in applications for Fall 2010. This meant that Marshall needed to offer its students the most engaging courses as possible to ensure they stay enrolled, and also that it also had to make sure it could accommodate such a large influx of students without having to add new rooms or entire buildings to its campus. So MU turned to Blackboard Collaborate.

Though many Marshall faculty had already been regularly using Blackboard Collaborate for several years, Blackboard Collaborate hadn't truly spread across the entire campus - until 2009 when MU unleashed an aggressive initiative that relied heavily on Blackboard Collaborate in order to:

- ▶ **Provide engaging online courses across all its campuses to better retain students**
- ▶ **Increase enrollment in online courses and thereby increase revenue**
- ▶ **Maximize its existing Blackboard Collaborate investment for lecture capture to save money**

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Allen Taylor
Chief Technology Officer
Marshall University

Quickly, Marshall enjoyed numerous benefits thanks to Blackboard Collaborate, including:

- ▶ **Retained students who said they otherwise would have dropped out**
- ▶ **Created an entirely new division for virtual courses (all via Blackboard Collaborate) to increase revenue**
- ▶ **Integrated its existing Polycom-based video conference rooms with Blackboard Collaborate Classroom, allowing students to attend classes both on-campus and online at the same time**
- ▶ **Transitioned faculty meetings to Blackboard Collaborate**
- ▶ **Improved retention rates by as much as 20% in multiple courses**
- ▶ **Students saved gas and money by not traveling to campus for office hours**
- ▶ **Allowed MU to support the large increase in enrollments without needing additional physical space**

So how did Marshall get here?

Located in a relatively remote area of West Virginia, Marshall has 16,000 students in its 10 colleges and schools which are spread over three campuses approximately 50 miles apart, including its medical school which has two locations away from MU's main campus. As of the Spring 2010 semester, Marshall had 200 fully online asynchronous courses and had just unveiled an entirely new project - Vclass - a collection of purely online courses that fully rely on Blackboard Collaborate.

At MU, the wide variety of use of Blackboard Collaborate includes hybrid instruction with faculty in an equipped video conferencing classroom, online office hours via instant messaging and virtual classrooms, lecture capture for on-demand review by students, and departmental meetings. It is this extensive breadth of scope and use that makes Blackboard Collaborate such a mission-critical solution for the university. And it's not going unnoticed.

According to Allen Taylor, Chief Technology Officer (CTO) of Marshall, the university's Provost Gayle Ormiston said, "Blackboard Collaborate, coupled with our course management system and other software, is transforming the way we do business. It allows us to greatly enhance the flexibility we can offer students and improves the interaction

and collaboration of faculty to students and students to students both in and outside of the classroom."

Clearly Blackboard Collaborate's ability to facilitate instruction, help, and meetings has already proven quite valuable.

On the instructional side, countless disciplines use Blackboard Collaborate. From math and engineering to science and sociology, MU faculty regularly rely on Blackboard Collaborate to enhance the engagement levels within their online courses.

"I think we're seeing the results of the increasing quality of technology and increasing use of technology," said Deanna Mader, Online Faculty Coordinator.

Another MU faculty member said, "I never felt comfortable teaching an online asynchronous class because of the lost spontaneous interaction. Blackboard Collaborate solves that problem. I receive much more in-depth questions and discussions when I teach with Blackboard Collaborate."

An engaged student is often a successful student. Thus it's clear that Blackboard Collaborate has played a vital role in helping Marshall retain its students - and thus retain valuable tuition dollars.

Tracy Christofero, a professor in the College of Information Technology and Engineering, began using Blackboard Collaborate in 2008 as a retention tool because some of her students were moving away from the Huntington area. "Primarily with graduate students, I'm concerned that they take jobs and have to move away, or they do a lot of travel," Christofero said. "It's a borderless education because you don't physically have to sit in a brick-and-mortar building. Blackboard Collaborate gives my students the opportunity to stay in our program."

Taylor even reports that some classes have increased their retention rates by as much as 20%.

In addition to retaining existing students, Blackboard Collaborate has even helped Marshall attract new ones.

Dr. Karen Mitchell, a professor in the Department of Mathematics, says, "Since my math class is held entirely live online via Blackboard Collaborate, I wouldn't have a class at all if it wasn't for Blackboard Collaborate. It's clearly important in attracting new students."

Taylor further adds, "Blackboard Collaborate has allowed our students to continue their education. One student recently told me that 'Blackboard Collaborate has allowed me to continue my education. Without it, I would have had to drop out.'"

Beyond instruction, Blackboard Collaborate helps with the University's business continuity and emergency preparedness plans.

Amid break-outs of the H1N1 virus in Fall 2009, instructors relied on Blackboard Collaborate when their students - often working adults - had to stay home to tend to their ill children. For example, Marty Laubach, Professor of Sociology, used Blackboard Collaborate primarily for its service to his night class students' convenience. "People who take later night classes tend to be more professional, and they tend to be students who have kids." Laubach said. "There can be a million reasons why they might have to stay home. I have a lot of students who are calling in from home and from dorms, especially this semester, because of the swine flu."

Convenience for students has also played a critical role as Marshall has developed its leading online education programs.

For instance, Dr. Mitchell says that Blackboard Collaborate is a very important tool because many of her students live all over West Virginia and they rarely have the opportunity to drive to Huntington for class. Therefore, her classes meet in real-time and she says that Blackboard Collaborate is "the only reason why we can run the program because there would be no way to get these students to a site for classes."

"It is a result of the change in culture that we're in, because it's not necessarily convenient or preferable for somebody to go through a traditional college program," said Deanna Mader, online faculty coordinator. Military students, in particular, benefit greatly from having access to their classes anytime.

And when anyone discusses anytime access to a course, they're often referring to lecture capture.

Marshall had long used Polycom video conferencing units for recording on-campus classes, but recently realized that they were a bit limiting in terms of not being able to widely distribute recordings to students. MU has since equipped



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its capture rooms to work with Blackboard Collaborate. Now students can take a class live or archived, whether on-campus or off. How's that for convenience?

"We have a lot of students who aren't good note takers and find they can't find time during class to reflect on what they learned," Taylor says. "They say, 'I now count on watching the Blackboard Collaborate archive and I am able to pay much more attention and participate in class instead of concentrating on note taking.'"

Dr. Mitchell says the ability to record lectures allows students who miss a class or do not understand something to have the opportunity to go back and listen to the lecture again. "I have students who are now listening to calculus as they drive two hours back and forth for work," she says.

Overall, it's amazing what Blackboard Collaborate has done for Marshall. From increasing retention rates and helping attract new students, to reducing travel and gas for faculty and students, to leveraging MU's existing lecture capture system - it's clear that Marshall will continue its role as a leading university well into the new decade.

