Top Ten Benefits of Using Blackboard Collaborate™ Web Conferencing

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What are the benefits of using Blackboard Collaborate web conferencing? Let's count just some of them. Ten to be exact!

1. Increase Completion Rates and Retention

At many academic institutions, the majority of distance courses use online asynchronous tools, possibly in conjunction with synchronous text chat or streaming video. However, with asynchronous technology, students can feel isolated and unmotivated working on their own with little contact with teachers and other students.

Research in distance learning indicates that student/teacher and student/student interaction greatly enhances student outcomes by improving attitude and motivation and building a sense of community. The result: increased coursework completion rates, higher test scores, and improved retention.

Historically, technology that increases interaction have been expensive, difficult to use, and not often utilized. With recent technological advances and the ubiquitous nature of the Internet, distance learning is being transformed. Today, it's easy and cost effective to incorporate interactive instruction and reusable content to create an ideal model of distributed learning that combines asynchronous online learning with synchronous solutions, like the virtual classroom.

Sunchild E-Learning Community is an organization dedicated to the academic achievement of the Canadian Aboriginal community, delivering education via the Internet to First Nation high school students in both urban and rural areas of Alberta, Canada. With Blackboard Collaborate, Sunchild provides a multi-dimensional, flexible environment that suits the learning style of First Nation students.

As a result, Sunchild has realized an 80% success rate with diploma achievement, a dramatic increase from the 17% graduation rate of the traditional education system. Also, since they implemented their eLearning model with Blackboard Collaborate the community has graduated more students in the last 3 years than in the previous 40 years. "The reason why we're so successful is that Blackboard Collaborate allows students to maintain their oral tradition and have control over their education, moving toward a written culture at their own pace," says Nelson Daychief, Director of Education.

2. Eliminate Geographical Barriers

With live eLearning and web collaboration technology, academic institutions can extend the boundaries of the physical classroom, leveraging limited teaching resources, providing guest lecturers and remote experts, expanding geographical reach to increase enrollment, and providing access for all, regardless of location.

Dr. Tom Moncrief, High School Curriculum Coordinator for the Performing Arts at **Union County Public Schools**, discovered that Blackboard Collaborate is a great way to take virtual field trips, enabling students to view a laparoscopic surgery or interview the entire cast of the musical Rent. "Without it, the travel time and logistical aspects of each intellectual exchange would have been impossible," he explains.

Georgia State University faculty has used Blackboard Collaborate for approximately 90 meetings and more than 400 participants. Applications for the technology include online office hours, guest lectures, and one-on-one collaboration sessions. At Georgia State, Blackboard Collaborate enables instructors and students to work together from remote locations throughout the state, nation, or world.

A small university with a global outlook, **Mount Saint Vincent University** (MSVU) uses synchronous online technology for virtual office hours and lab sessions and to add real-time interaction to distance learning. MSVU also launched its first fully blended onsite/online course, connecting students on a global level from such widespread locations as Chicago, Kuwait, Bermuda, and Jordan.

3. Build Online Communities

Today's students can use synchronous technology collaborate without limits—across campus, throughout a nation, or across the globe—and build vibrant learning communities that encourage participation and stimulate innovation. With Blackboard Collaborate institutions and instructors can even set up virtual student rooms for scheduled meetings or ad hoc collaboration, with or without a teacher present.

An online professional doctoral degree program for working pharmacists, the Non-Traditional Doctor of Pharmacy (NTDP) program at **Ohio State University** needed a more reliable, interactive way to interact than text messaging or Office Hours Live audio chat. The university selected Blackboard Collaborate because it supports a classroom orientation, making it very easy for students to interact, collaborate, and work as a team, with or without an instructor. In fact, the NTDP received the Excellence in College and University Distance Education National Award from the American Distance Education Consortium for demonstrating an impressive impact in reaching a diverse audience.

4. Save Travel Costs

Today, academic institutions are required to balance educational outcomes with the financial bottom line, including demonstrating a rapid return on their technology investment. Doing more with less has become a way of life for academia as it has in the business world. At the same time, schools are operating in an increasingly competitive environment and global marketplace. Synchronous online learning is a cost-effective solution that provides universal access with lower total cost of ownership and strong ROI.

To overcome budgeting concerns, the starting point for the **Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation** (CDLI) was a need to provide a high-quality level of service to distance education students. CDLI found that the blended model provided a sweet spot that optimized appropriately for both budget and student achievement. For the virtual synchronous environment, any additional costs are offset by greatly reduced travel, increased availability, and scalability that enables broader coverage.

The College of Education was established at the **University of Hawaii** in 2002 to address a statewide teacher shortage and now provides about 50% of instructors needed in the state. While the college has a hybrid distance education program in which students and faculty travel three weekends every semester for face-to-face time, paying instructors to travel was expensive. In addition, the University of Hawaii system also uses interactive television, which is difficult and costly to expand. In an effort to shift from travel to online meeting, they are getting together virtually to eliminate a single weekend of travel in the current semester, which represents about $4,500 in savings.

Recently, the university also used web conferencing software for a meeting that regularly required faculty and students to travel to Oahu for a half-day meeting before school began and then return to the other islands and mainline only to come back later when school started. The meeting was held online, saving $4,800 in travel costs.

5. Increase Staff Productivity

Blackboard Collaborate provides an enhanced meeting environment with voice over the Internet that eliminates travel time and lost hours at the office. With the proliferation of multi-campus institutions with satellite campuses, the advantages of virtual live meeting technology becomes more apparent, especially in tight state budget climates. Many institutions are using web conferencing for executive council and committee meetings.

California State University Northridge held a recent meeting of the Provost's Council, which includes all the deans of the school, in Blackboard Collaborate, and there are plans to hold meetings for all the provosts intra-campus remotely using the virtual conference room.
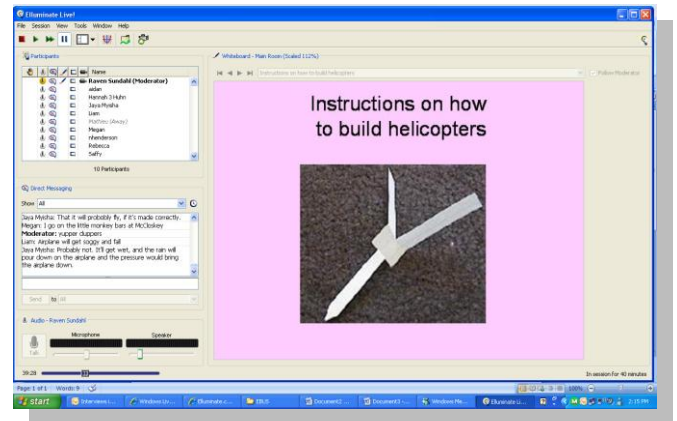
When executives from **Los Angeles Unified School District** would meet in downtown LA for 1-2 hour executive meetings, many traveled as much as 3 hours roundtrip. A meeting was held in Blackboard Collaborate with multiple moderators, which included a brief presentation from a math/science visualization application. The virtual meeting eliminated travel time, enabling participants to still have a productive day at the office.

The **Chester County Intermediate Unit** works with the **Pennsylvania Department of Education** and 12 local school districts that represent over 64,000 students and 6,000 educators. Adding interaction to meetings and online learning activities was key for both organizations. With Blackboard Collaborate the organizations eliminated travel for attendees and presenters for their Pennsylvania Technology Leadership Academy for school board directors and business managers. Blackboard Collaborate also allowed participants in a statewide strategic planning process workgroup to meet even when faced with a sudden snowstorm or two.

6. Accommodate Multiple Learning Styles

 Blackboard Collaborate web conferencing provides two-way voice over the Internet, instant messaging, and a shared, interactive whiteboard to display educational content. All of these features create a rich and engaging learning environment that allows users to benefit fully from sessions regardless of their preferred learning styles.

Raven Sundahl's Wacky Wednesday classes for grades K through 7 at **EBUS Academy** have something for everyone. One recent session included using the interactive whiteboard to indicate locations on a map, doing a craft project, singing songs together using the microphone, texting answers to questions during a game, visiting a web site, and reading a book that was scanned in.

7. Incorporate Technology in the Classroom

Students in traditional brick and mortar classrooms are changing the way they learn and interact. Often referred to as "digital natives," today's students have grown up in a digital world and demand that schools keep in step with their learning styles. At the same time, educators have realized that their teaching styles must change to keep students engaged and actively learning.

Joe Donlon, a technician for Continuing Education at **Confederation College**, was approached by an academic support strategist with a problem. The strategist was working in the classroom with a hearing-challenged student, sharing a laptop on which she took lecture notes for the student. However, the strategist wanted the student to be as independent as possible while still benefiting from her real-time notes.

Using Blackboard Collaborate with application sharing and chat, the strategist is now able to successfully share notes with the student from anywhere in the classroom via their respective laptops. What's more, it doesn't matter that one laptop is a PC and the other a Mac because users interact in real time, regardless of computer platform. The result: more independence for the student, and for the academic strategist, the ability to provide support in a less obvious way.

The **Pennsylvania Department of Education** wanted to inspire students across the state with reading and creative thinking. So they invited FableVision CEO and acclaimed author Peter Reynolds into over 80 classrooms across the state. Reynolds believes that technology, media, and storytelling combined are great tools to engage all children, especially those who don't feel plugged into school. That's why a key part of his mission is to reach as many students as possible while juggling numerous creative projects in his FableVision studio. Blackboard Collaborate offers a flexible environment where Reynolds can do just that. For Reynolds, technology, like Blackboard Collaborate, is part of the answer, providing the means to migrate powerful ideas in powerful ways.

8. Scale Information and Knowledge

Key functionality in any virtual classroom should include the ability to record and playback sessions, creating reusable learning objects to maximize access and leverage resources. Recorded classes can be used for exam review, and information sessions can be pre-recorded to provide before a course begins. In addition, pre-recorded training for faculty, students, and staff on topics like commonly used applications or online library resources can be developed. Creating an easily accessible knowledge base of interactive, indexed recordings is easy with Blackboard Collaborate.

With the objective of expanding interaction and collaboration on a global level, the **University of Iowa** selected Blackboard Collaborate to facilitate international occupational and environmental health training and research with countries in Central and Eastern Europe, many of which have slow and unreliable Internet connections. With Blackboard Collaborate, countries can participate fully in sessions and create recordings that can be used worldwide to address common environmental problems.

One of the largest higher education institutions in the state, California State University Northridge selected Blackboard Collaborate because its functionality closely mirrored the activities of a face-to-face classroom, enabling instructors and students to transition to an online environment without significantly modifying their behavior. The high-quality voice over the Internet and multi-platform support were also important, as was the record/playback feature that enables students to review course material. And unlike competing solutions, there is no cost to access archived recordings, making Blackboard Collaborate cost-effective to operate.

9. Leverage Limited Teaching Resources

Live eLearning and web collaboration technology mirrors the interaction of the traditional classroom session or face-to-face meeting, while eliminating the need for expensive teleconferencing and travel. A single teacher can be leveraged to reduce the need for additional hiring, a regularly scheduled faculty meeting can be replaced with an Internet-based session, students from multiple campuses can be combined to fill an online class, and a remote subject matter expert can address a class in real time from across the globe without traveling a mile.

10. Provide Professional Development

The **New York State Teacher Centers**, 427 sites that provide professional development for 239,000 teachers throughout the state, wanted to deliver online professional development courses for instructors. Blackboard Collaborate enables mentoring for center directors and the delivery of online courses that train teachers on the technology they need to handle their official reporting responsibilities. And because it doesn't require a steep learning curve, the live online environment became a useful and popular tool in just months, providing both technological and emotional support for instructors.

Not just for the academic environment, Blackboard Collaborate also enables corporations to facilitate training and development. ADP Dealer Services provides integrated computing solutions to 19,500 auto, truck, motorcycle, marine and recreational vehicle dealers throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe. The company selected Blackboard Collaborate to facilitate learning for thousands of automobile dealership employees who attend classes each month.

ADP's uses Blackboard Collaborate to provide hands-on training with an instructor over the Internet. In a continuing effort to expand its in-dealership training offerings, ADP will add Blackboard Collaborate to existing blended eLearning programs that include self-paced, web-based tutorials and coach training via telephone and Internet. In addition, students can use Blackboard Collaborate breakout rooms individually or in groups for practice labs and discussions with the instructor or fellow attendees. Blackboard Collaborate enables ADP to mimic the interactive experience trainees receive in a traditional classroom setting without the travel and time away from job.

What's Next?

Check out these additional Blackboard Collaborate resources:

- Read "10 Cool Ways to Engage with Blackboard Collaborate" white paper. [Download now](#).

- Promote adoption at your campus with our Blackboard Collaborate Champion Toolkit. [Contact us](#).

- Learn more about the key features and benefits of Blackboard Collaborate. [View recorded demos](#).

- Visit our On-Demand Learning Center for the latest learning resources. [Learn more](#).

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