

Virtual Meetings at Bradford

The University has a videoconferencing suite, which is mainly used for international meetings involving senior managers. However, the main technology used – with 8000 sessions in 2010 - is Blackboard Collaborate (previously Elluminate). This is designed as a virtual classroom, with audio and video streams supported by whiteboards, document and other content sharing, chat, breakout sessions and polling. Many users access it from their desktop or a laptop. A SustelT survey in late 2010 found that the virtual meetings (VM) held had an average of 6-7 participants at 3-4 separate locations. Around 60% of respondents said their last virtual meeting had been completely successful in meeting its objectives, and 44% said it definitely or almost certainly replaced a face to face meeting. Of the latter the virtual meeting avoided an average of around 310 miles travelled there and back at an average cost of around £130.



Will Stewart

Delivering Teaching in Pakistan

Namal College, in the remote North West of Pakistan, is an associate college of Bradford, specialising in technical and engineering courses in English. All teaching staff have to complete Bradford's PostGraduate Certificate in Higher Education Practice, PGC (HEP), which is delivered from the University using Blackboard Collaborate. All sessions are recorded so that they can be viewed subsequently. The students also use the technology to do group and individual presentations, with Bradford tutors monitoring not only the effect on themselves, but also the interaction between presenters and their fellow students in Pakistan. Skype is also used for one to one teaching or communication between the two sites. Course tutor Will Stewart, of the University's Academic Development Unit, notes that *"The students have responded well after some initial training, and really appreciate the opportunity for real time interaction with Bradford staff. The only real problem we've had is when occasional power outages in Pakistan take out the connection and we have to wait a few minutes for the emergency generators to kick in."*

Key Points

- Bradford uses Blackboard Collaborate extensively for teaching and virtual meetings, with 8,000 sessions in 2010.
- Several virtual courses also use Ning and Skype.
- Virtual meetings held in 2010 had an average of 6-7 participants at 3-4 locations. Those which replaced a face-to-face meeting avoided an average of 310 miles travel and costs of £130.
- Blackboard Collaborate is used to deliver a unique online course in Biosecurity Education to a global audience. The assessment method involves groups of students from separate countries delivering virtual presentations.
- The software has also avoided travel by delivering conferences remotely, and through virtual meetings with external examiners.

SustelT Case No. 10: Conferencing and E-Learning at Bradford

Extending Environmental Audiences

The University's Ecoversity initiative used Blackboard Collaborate to amplify two major environmental conferences, featuring speakers from around the world, in 2010. The sessions were streamed live (and recorded), and attendees and speakers viewed and responded to the comments and questions of external participants in the Q & A session. The second event launched a new virtual PG Certificate in Circular Economy, which is being run in conjunction with the Ellen MacArthur Foundation. The course uses Blackboard Collaborate, Ning and other technologies in a similar manner to the PGC (HEP) (see over).



Cathy Bollaert

Making the World More Biosecure

Some life sciences research has the potential for both good and evil (such as modifying organisms for medical or biological warfare reasons). Bradford's Disarmament Research Centre offers a unique online course in Applied Dual-Use Biosecurity Education which raises awareness of these issues, and highlights practical measures which policy makers, researchers and others can take to prevent harmful outcomes. The module's 12 lectures and 6 seminars have so far been delivered to more than 30 students in almost 15 different countries via Blackboard Collaborate, with accompanying use of its chat, webtools, and breakout group applications. One assessment method also involves a group of 3 students from separate countries preparing a group presentation (typically using Skype to do so) and then presenting it to the other students and teaching staff via Collaborate. The social network software Ning is also used to create a hub outside Blackboard for contact between students, with the hope that this will evolve into a worldwide, online, biosecurity network. Programme Manager Cathy Bollaert believes that *"Although many participants had no experience of conferencing or online networking at the start, they've quickly embraced the technologies and had few difficulties. They really appreciate the opportunity to have real time interaction with both staff and their fellow students. This has also helped to build strong professional friendships across borders, which is an unexpected outcome for us. I'm sure that this will be a foundation for the development of the international community we need to ensure that bio research is not misused."*

Views

"As the examples show, conferencing and collaboration tools offer great opportunities for universities to extend their reach, and to provide new stimulating approaches that foster deep approaches to learning for both students and collaborative partners. E-learning techniques offer high quality learning opportunities that are increasingly challenging the myth that traditional modes of learning are more effective."

Shirley Congdon, Dean, School of Health Studies, and PVC (Learning and Teaching)

"A scheduled course review meeting was made virtual because of snow. This allowed us to keep on track and the external examiner was both relieved at not having to travel, and – as a first time user – was most impressed by the technology. Whilst conferencing can create some travel – e.g. by tutors on new virtual courses – research shows that overall there is a much greater level of travel avoidance."

Peter Hopkinson, Director of ESD & Circular Economy Course Leader

Further information: See www.goodcampus.org. Version 1.0 September 2011.

Disclaimer – Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, but readers should verify all information.