

Improve Student Outcomes with Blackboard Collaborate



BlackboardCollaborate»

The more engaged a student is during a course, the more successful that student will be. For a decade this adage has been applied to online courses that utilize collaborative technologies, but unfortunately, the problem has been that schools have been unable to find any quantitative data to support this hunch – until now. Over the last two years, numerous schools have found abundant results linking students engaged via Blackboard Collaborate’s collaboration technologies to higher grades and test scores.

“When a whole school uses Blackboard Collaborate, we improve our ability to achieve academic success.”

Mary Prentice

Academic Technology Specialist
Thomas University

The staff of the Arizona Virtual Academy (AZVA) knows that all children are special, each with their unique strengths, weaknesses, and dreams. That’s why the AZVA and leading online curriculum provider, K12, work together to ignite the minds of children, bringing learning and innate possibility to life. Through the use of Blackboard Collaborate, the school saw performance gains among at-risk students when they were required to attend collaborative online courses, as teachers have been able to more easily target students individually in their areas of weakness and assist them with their struggles. Upon a regimen of required collaborative online reading, writing, and math programs, student reading scores improved by 25%, writing scores improved by 52%, and math scores improved by 17%.

Nichole McCauley, AZVA’s K-8 Principal, says, “In using [Blackboard Collaborate], we have been able to better meet the needs of our students, staff, and parents. We continue to implement live and recorded training and are pleased to have seen a dramatic increase in communication, support, and student achievement.”¹

At the University of Utah, students who listened to archives of live classes in the Fall 2009 and Spring 2010 semesters achieved 24% higher grades on course quizzes and final exams than students who only utilized alternative PowerPoint slides with no audio. These students were so pleased with their own improvement that 82%

1. Blackboard Collaborate Staff, “Arizona Virtual Academy.” Elluminate.com. 2010.

of them said they were 'likely' or 'very likely' to recommend a live, Blackboard Collaborate-based course to their friends.

"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," says Linda Ralston, Technology Assisted Curriculum Center at the University of Utah.²

Similarly, technologists at Columbus State University (CSU) also find a "high correlation in achievement levels and levels of understanding between those that participate in live online classes and those that do not." The CSU tech team also finds that students who participate and view archived classes are better prepared and do a better job than those that stay isolated.³

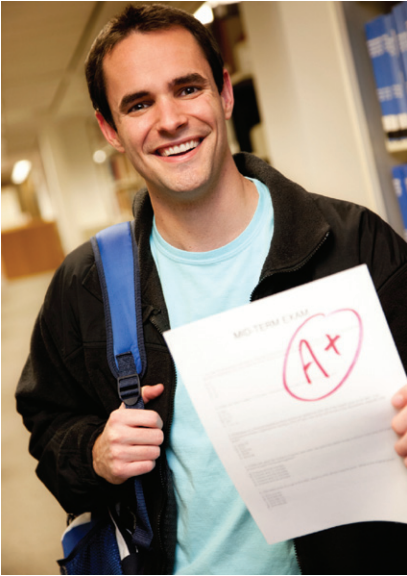
While AZVA, the University of Utah, and Columbus State utilize Blackboard Collaborate in a handful of different disciplines, several school districts across the state of North Carolina use collaboration technologies in myriad subjects, and, according to Dr. Mack McCary, Chief Academic Officer of the Guilford County Schools, regardless of the subject matter, have seen "astounding results" in student achievement such as:

- Science students went from being 20% proficient in the 2007-2008 year to over 80% proficient in 2008-2009, due largely to replacing almost all multiple choice testing with more authentic projects and writing assessments, highly engaging lessons, and involving students in diagnosing their own learning progress.
- Students in two schools in a first year US History class all scored 100% despite some only having 0.3-0.5% chance of scoring proficient according to EVAAS data. This teacher framed learning as a team sport, and saw increased student motivation and initiative to assist other students in learning so they could beat the district average.



² Grow, Rebekah, "Wimba Study Break: Increasing Retention Rates of Online Courses via Collaborative Technology. The Wimba Distinguished Lecture Series (webcast). February 24, 2010.

³ Shouppe, Gary, "Wimba Study Break: How Georgia Connects and Saves with Online Learning." The Wimba Distinguished Lecture Series (webcast). March 15, 2010.



After adding Blackboard Collaborate into both her face-to-face and online classes, **Angela Gilleland of Georgia Perimeter College** found that discussion grades went up by an average of 8% and essay grades went up by 13 points on average.

- Other science students all scored level 4's after receiving detailed formative feedback to better understand the Standard Course of Study and monitor their own progress toward mastery of those standards.
- Algebra 1 students scored 100% proficient and almost all Geometry students scored 100%, a dramatic turnaround from the previous year. The teacher created a 'safe classroom' culture within which students were more willing to take risks such as providing feedback to the teacher about what prevented their learning and what he could change to help them, as well as presenting their thinking to the class even when they were unsure if they were right. Students were also more willing to jump in to assist fellow students in thinking through how to solve a problem. The teacher reported that listening to the students thinking out loud was an invaluable diagnostic tool for him to see where students were confused about a concept and intervene.
- Dramatic increase in students willing to stay for tutoring, as the school utilized benchmark and other formative assessments to customize tutoring for what each student needed to work on.
- Rapid dissemination of resources to enable students to analyze their benchmark and classroom test results by each question, to identify strengths and target their improvement efforts. This involved students to take greater responsibility in planning how to improve their own learning as well as that of their classmates.
- Increasing use of students as peer tutors and teachers, as classroom teachers discovered that students were often able to frame concepts in ways that other students could understand and learn.

"I thought you might appreciate how much Blackboard Collaborate has meant to the principals and teachers," writes Dr. McCary. "Our teachers have achieved amazing student achievement results."⁴

Dr. McCary's point is that via collaborative technologies, faculty can more easily give in-depth help and feedback to students. Several educators in the United Kingdom definitely agree.

4 McCary, Dr. Mack, "Guilford County Schools - Best Practices: NCVPS Balanced Assessment for Learning Pilot," November 2009.

Alex Spiers, Alice Bird, and Chris Taylor of Liverpool John Moores University find that formative assessment is specifically intended to produce feedback on student performance, thereby improving and accelerating learning. According to their research, both synchronous and asynchronous Blackboard Collaborate technologies allow instructors to easily provide detailed feedback to students – in particular, audio feedback. In particular, they find that using Blackboard Collaborate to deliver formative feedback to level one undergraduate students ultimately helps accelerate their learning.⁵

In 2008, Georgia Perimeter College History instructor Angela Gilleland noticed that students in her online courses weren't completing assignments as often as those in her face-to-face courses. In an attempt to solve this problem, Gilleland started using Blackboard Collaborate to provide audible instructions and directions about assignments and immediately noticed that her vocal content improved student achievement. In fact, student achievement also improved in her face-to-face courses when she added supplemental vocal information online when she wanted to clarify important points. "You can use Blackboard Collaborate to verbally reiterate any assignment or procedure that students need to know about," Gilleland says.

She found that discussion grades went up by an average of 8% and essay grades went up 13 points on average. The extra clarification, according to the Gilleland, allows students to revisit important points as often as necessary. "It took no time at all. Using Blackboard Collaborate was the easiest

thing I could have done for my class and it was also the most beneficial. It was just a matter of recording myself. That's it," she says. "I found the stats on non-participating students for my discussion and essay assignments before and after implementing Blackboard Collaborate and WOW!"

In the Fall of 2008, before she implemented Blackboard Collaborate, 22% of the total discussion assignments for the semester were not completed and 25% of the essays were not attempted. But for the Spring 2009 semester after implementing Blackboard Collaborate, only 11% of the total discussion assignments were unattempted and only 13% of the essays were not completed. This means that Gilleland's non-participant stats were cut in half for discussions and dropped by 12% (nearly half) for essays. All because she added her voice to her online classes to clarify points she couldn't expand upon during class.⁶

Wright State University (WSU) uses Blackboard Collaborate to increase student completion rates for its distance education programs as well as build a better sense of community among its students and faculty. WSU utilizes a virtual classroom to create classes when students cannot attend in a traditional face-to-face format and to accommodate those who can't attend face-to-face classes during flu seasons or inclement weather. In a true demonstration of Blackboard Collaborate helping personal achievement, a WSU history professor credits the flexibility offered via collaboration technology with saving her job when she was unable to teach classes in-person during chemotherapy treatment – but she could live online.

⁵ Bird, Alice, Spiers, Alex, and Taylor, Chris, "A Few Words in Your Ear." Wimba Connect 2009 Conference. April 2009.

⁶ Gilleland, Angela, Georgia Perimeter College. "USG Wimba Innovations Contest 2" (webcast). April 14, 2010.

Additionally, 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%.

“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.”

Sheri Stover

CTL Instructional Designer
Wright State

“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.”⁷

A school can improve its rankings by utilizing Blackboard Collaborate as well. For example, in 2009, the North Carolina Virtual Public School become a top 10 nationally ranked virtual school by the Center of Digital Education’s Survey of the States report, according to Bryan Setser, Chief Executive Officer of North Carolina Virtual School.

Additionally, Sara Hagen, a music professor at relatively unknown Valley City State University (ND) says, “[Blackboard Collaborate] has really opened up a lot of doors for us. We’re now listed second on Ask.com for online music programs, only behind Berklee College of Music,”⁸ one of the most prestigious music schools in the world.

Beyond improving tangible results such as exam scores or school rankings, Blackboard Collaborate also positively impacts many of the equally valuable intangibles of education.

Valdosta State University (VSU) has used Blackboard Collaborate since 2007 for study abroad programs in which VSU instructors team their students – who mostly live in rural Georgia – with peers in Germany, Russia, and Ukraine. VSU’s Jon Sizemore and Beatriz Potter conduct surveys after each program and have found that 100% of their students believe that these virtual study abroad seminars “improved their multicultural awareness of other cultures.” Additionally, 92.8% of their students positively changed their perspectives of students in other countries.⁹

7 Blackboard Collaborate Staff, “Wright State University.” Elluminate.com. 2010.

8 Hagen, Sara, “Wimba WOW Workshop” (webcast). November 19, 2009.

9 Potter, Beatriz and Sizemore, Jon, “Faculty and Student Support Without Borders.” Wimba Distinguished Lecture Series (webcast). December 8, 2009.

Louis Mays, a librarian and professor at Southern State Community College (OH) similarly uses Blackboard Collaborate to expose his rural, isolated students to the greater world. “I use collaboration to expose my students to other classes, other faculty members, and other people in other parts of the world,” says Mays when asked how he allows his secluded students to see a greater global view of the world.

In fact, Mays is such a believer of using Blackboard Collaborate to teach the intangibles of education, he’s always finding new ways to assist his students. He began leading webinars that teach incoming students about how to prepare for college as well as to familiarize students with online courseware. “The site goes beyond the textbook and covers local resources that help students succeed in college,” he says. “I believe this course increases student retention and academic success.”¹⁰

Even these seemingly little, intangible successes can be great. Alexia Smith, a Foreign Language professor at Grand Valley State University (MI) relies on Blackboard Collaborate to accelerate the learning of students in her Chinese class. She says, “Because of Blackboard Collaborate I can see my students listening comprehension improving and they’re able to integrate Chinese into their daily life. I cannot stress more how important the voice functions in Blackboard Collaborate are for language learning.”

In fact, many others also find that Blackboard Collaborate helps students learn languages quickly.



Dr. Lunden E. MacDonald, Assistant Professor of Spanish at Metropolitan State College in Denver, credits MySpanishLab – a combination of Blackboard Collaborate and Pearson language learning content – with improved student performance in her Introduction To Spanish courses. “We are able to focus more on speaking and communicative practice,” says MacDonald. “MySpanishLab has made for a noticeably higher level of communicative ability among my students.”

In fact, MyLanguageLabs at Metropolitan State College received the 2010 IMS Global Learning Consortium’s Learning Impact Leadership Award in recognition of improved student performance and instructor efficiency, and cost savings.¹¹

And students couldn’t agree more.

At the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, 100% of students responded to a Fall 2010 survey asking if they believe seeing their online instructor via video is helpful. Most students commented that video helps reinforce important messages and therefore helps them perform better.¹²

¹⁰ Mays, Louis, ‘College Success.’ Live Webinar. September 1, 2010.

¹¹ Wimba Staff, “Pearson Suite of MyLanguageLabs™ Expands Use of Wimba Collaboration Solutions for All Languages.” Wimba (press release). July 6, 2010.

¹² Anderson, Sheri, “Immersive Training.” Wimba Connect 2010 User Conference. March 23, 2010.

At the University of West Georgia, instructors use Blackboard Collaborate to observe pre-service teacher students at Texas Women's University in Denton, TX to determine if they can transfer theoretical learning to the real-world environment. After being monitored virtually for several months, students responded to a survey and were overwhelmingly in favor of Blackboard Collaborate because it helped them improve quicker than when without it.

And students who collaborate instantly perform better as well. Sherry Barricklow, Academic Systems Coordinator and instructor at Grand Valley State University, began using Blackboard Collaborate in 2008 in her undergraduate research course because, at first, it served as a

University of West Georgia Survey Results

- 100% of students agreed or strongly agreed when asked if they felt better prepared to go out and teach in the real world after taking a class via Blackboard Collaborate
- 100% of students agreed or strongly agreed when asked if the Blackboard Collaborate chat box helped them get answers to their questions
- 100% of students agreed or strongly agreed when asked if they could more easily understand difficult content¹³

“convenient, open office hours for students who wanted to reach me quickly,” she said. But she soon realized that Blackboard Collaborate could be used much more broadly. Since, she has used Pronto to work with groups of students on weekly assignments in her research course and finds that students who attend return week after week and “usually do better in all aspects of the course.”

As if all the data above wasn't testament enough to how collaborative technologies can help improve student outcomes, the country's leading professional development association conducted an exhaustive study in 2009 and too found that educators need to better engage students online. The report concludes, “Professional development is... most effective when teachers actively engage in collaborative professional communities focused on instructional improvement and student achievement.”¹⁴

Perhaps Mary Prentice, Academic Technology Specialist at Thomas University, sums it up best when she says, “Our faculty are Blackboard Collaborate fans and they demonstrate their unique and innovative ways of using collaboration technology to engage and connect with students who actually talk about how the technology has changed their online learning experience. When a whole school uses Blackboard Collaborate, we improve our ability to achieve academic success.”¹⁵

13 Gantner, Myrna, Mobbs, Kevin, and Dunlap, Karen, “Wimba Study Break: Wimba Stretches Pedagogical Boundaries: Peer Teaching Across Two Institutions.” The Wimba Distinguished Lecture Series (webcast). October 27, 2010.

14 Wei, RC, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, N, Orphanos, S, “Professional learning in the learning profession: A status report on teacher development in the United States and abroad.” National Staff Development Council. 2009.

15 Blackboard Collaborate Staff, “Thomas University.” Elluminate.com. 2010.