

The Picture of Student Success: Capella University Boosts Learning Outcomes with NBC Learn and Blackboard

Online learners have a unique opportunity for a fully interactive education—one filled with dynamic visuals that bring subjects to life. Capella University strives to provide this rich educational experience to its students while also holding to high instructional standards. To accomplish this, it leverages Blackboard Learn™ to enable a robust online learning environment and NBC Learn to provide timely, relevant and high-quality video from a source Capella can trust. The partnership between Blackboard and NBC Learn offers educators easy-to-access multimedia content about real-world events—content that is instructionally sound and relevant to curricula.

During years in a traditional classroom, Dr. Terry Tirrito rarely saw students fully engage with the subject matter—or with one another. Then she began teaching online-only courses through Capella University, and that changed.

Capella students in Dr. Tirrito’s social work courses use online discussion boards to trade ideas and debate points of view. They create virtual teams to tackle assignments. And from dozens of locations across the country, they connect through the shared experience of compelling multimedia content, such as the NBC video clips integrated into Tirrito’s courses.

When students were studying leadership strategies, Dr. Tirrito asked them to watch and discuss an NBC video clip about how community leaders in Haiti were managing aid after the nation’s devastating earthquake.

Jennifer Anderson-Meger, a doctoral candidate in Capella’s social work program, recalled the assignment. “Seeing videos of the effects of the earthquake really does make you conscious of your own surroundings and comfort, but we had to go beyond that emotional reaction to use the video to identify who the players were in the Haitian crisis. We had to apply leadership skills to how

we, as social workers, would have handled the situation.

“The questions that the instructor posed based on those videos were very challenging,” she says. “I think our discussions are much richer because the video gives us all a common point of discussion.”

Not only is video compelling, Dr. Tirrito says, it’s also efficient. “The information in that four-minute video is like what you get from a 30-page article,” she says. “It helps students who are visual learners. Videos bring the assignment to life.”

Superior Student Content Starts with Rigorous Standards

More than 40,000 learners are enrolled in Capella University's 1,450 online courses, and it's crucial that each gets the same level of high-quality instruction. That's why Capella has spent two decades crafting course standards that focus on the knowledge students must gain to be successful in their academic and professional careers.

"We work closely with professional associations and other experts to identify the skills and knowledge that demonstrate an expected level of mastery in a professional discipline," says Keith Koch, Capella University's vice president of Next-Generation Learning. "Then we work with faculty to design our degree programs to deliver those skills and knowledge in an appropriate sequence over the various courses in the program."

Capella University's competency-based learning model requires rigor and discipline in the course-development process, and it also requires that faculty and learners have access to thoughtfully

integrated technologies and high-quality content to give every learner the opportunity for an outstanding educational experience.


"We assess students based on specified learning outcomes, and we use a disciplined, centralized course-development process so we're able to deliver a consistent learner experience and reliably measure learning outcomes while adhering to rigorous standards," Koch says. "We don't start with the content. We start with the learning outcomes and work backward to the appropriate and necessary content."

It's a unique course-development system requiring unique talent and technology and designed for a unique population of learners, says Rosann Cahill, an online product manager in Capella's Next-Generation Learning department. "At Capella, building the online course is not just the duty of the instructor. Instead, faculty members, who are practitioners as well as scholars, work closely with instructional design and multimedia

development specialists to design relevant, engaging learning activities through which learners demonstrate their achievement of competencies. While we create much of our own content here at Capella, high-quality third-party video content ultimately helps us make a more engaging learning experience."


Here's how Capella's course-development system works. Using the competency-based standards for each course, course developers outline what students need to learn to gain proficiency. They work with faculty to select and shape appropriate content. That content then must pass muster with Capella's quality-assurance team. Finally, the course requirements and content are built into online learning modules available to students.

It's an exacting system that requires Capella to have a robust, reliable technology platform and easy access to high-quality, trusted multimedia content. That's where Blackboard Learn and NBC Learn come in.



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More than 40,000 learners take Capella University's 1,450 online courses, and it's crucial that each gets the same high-quality instruction and course content.



NBC Learn provides Capella with an extensive library of current, relevant and high-quality multimedia content from a trusted source, the educational arm of NBC News.



Multimedia content is seamlessly integrated into the Blackboard Learn platform that has supported the core of Capella learners' courseroom experience since 2003.

Blackboard Learn-NBC Learn Functionality Is Critical

Capella relies on Blackboard technology to support the core of its courseroom experience—everything from enabling learner discussions online to tracking progress to faculty feedback on student achievement. Capella has partnered with Blackboard since 2003, and as the university has enhanced its online courses, it has provided increasingly interactive course materials such as three-dimensional presentations and dynamically changing maps and graphics.

NBC Learn gives Capella access to an extensive library of current, relevant and high-quality multimedia content—all from a source Capella can use with confidence. As the educational arm of NBC News, NBC Learn taps into the global resources of the esteemed news organization, as well as the network's historic film and video archives.

"We create about 100 courses every 10 to 12 weeks, about half of which are new courses for new programs," Koch says. "We create about 200 to 300 multimedia pieces per quarter, but that doesn't supply everything we need. If we can't make it all, how do we give our faculty a way to use high-quality content?"

That's what has been so great about NBC Learn. We get trusted content that is created using high production quality. It is easy to search and is edited and packaged specifically for online use."



Blackboard supports NBC Learn's multimedia content, such as this video about the Haitian earthquake, on students' portable devices.

Blackboard Learn-NBC Learn Functionality Is Critical *continued*

Koch says it is also critical that NBC Learn works well within Blackboard. “The fact that Blackboard and NBC Learn can share a learner’s login is very important,” he says. “And our combination of NBC Learn and Blackboard just shows Capella’s capacity for really using all the tools Blackboard builds.”

Anderson-Meger says such simplicity is essential to her success as a learner. “I’m not a technological wizard, but this is easy to use. Because the video is incorporated into the Capella courseroom, it is absolutely seamless. I don’t have to bookmark sites. I don’t have to work off an instructor’s list of web content that I would have to go find,” she says. “I already spend many hours each week on my coursework, plus my job and family. Having to hunt for content would just be a whole other commitment of time.”

Laura Badaracco Amend, an associate course developer for Capella, says the combined functionality also allows her to do her best work. “We wouldn’t be using NBC Learn if it didn’t sync with Blackboard,” she says. “That they work seamlessly together means I can focus less on the mechanics of finding and posting content and more on the art of choosing exactly which piece of content will lend itself to engaging classroom discussion.”

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