

Northern Illinois University Enables Top-Notch Instruction

Blackboard Platform Suite Delivers Complete Integrated Solution

Good teaching yields good teachers. That's the fundamental tenet of the Northern Illinois University (NIU) faculty development program. For more than a decade, it has pioneered ways to train instructors to use tools and techniques that engage students and boost student success. These tools are increasingly interactive, and so are the techniques.

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JASON RHODE
Assistant Director
Faculty Development and Instructional
Design Center
Northern Illinois University

NIU MEETS STUDENT DEMAND FOR ONLINE AND MOBILE LEARNING

This instructional evolution is driven by NIU students—many of them commuters—who expect a flexible, active-learning environment. They want to tap into an instructor's web conferencing session from a Smartphone. They prefer to watch lectures as homework, so their in-class time is spent collaborating with instructors and other students. They read assignments and textbooks on their iPads, share research with classmates via online chats, and cannot conceive of waiting by the mailbox for end-of-semester grades.

The university's president has set a goal of adding up to 42 additional online degree programs and certificates by 2020, prioritized according to student demand. It will be a huge leap from the eight online degree programs the university now offers, significantly expanding course offerings.

It's a long list of wants, and it takes a fully-loaded learning technology toolbox to accommodate them. For NIU, that toolbox is packed with Blackboard Learn, Blackboard Collaborate and Blackboard Mobile solutions.

BLACKBOARD MOBILE LEARN @ NIU

ON-THE-GO LEARNING

CAPABILITIES

- **Natively built mobile apps for most popular mobile platforms and devices**
- **Anytime, anywhere access to course materials**
- **Peer-to-peer and faculty interaction via discussion boards, blogs, and announcements**

BENEFITS

- **Increased course interaction**
- **Enhanced student engagement**
- **Improved attitudes about learning**



NIU MEETS ACTIVE-LEARNING CHALLENGE

NIU will achieve its goal for online growth with the help of Blackboard, which the school has chosen again and again to elevate student instruction, enable faculty development and deliver other operational efficiency benefits.

According to Jason Rhode, assistant director, Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center, support for expanding NIU's Blackboard implementation comes from all corners of campus:

- **Instructors demand a single learning management platform they know and trust**
- **Students demand the ease of Blackboard's anywhere/anytime access**
- **Administrators demand the seamless integration and reliable delivery that comes with using Blackboard's suite of products**

An institution can only support so many platforms, so many tools," Rhode says. "It has been key to have a centralized learning management system with so many different capabilities. When we've had a choice about adding more learning technology tools, we have always come back to Blackboard."

STUDENTS DRIVE INCREASED ACCESS TO LEARNING RESOURCES

The campuswide adoption of Blackboard is expected to continue growing—with students leading the way. More than 96 percent of NIU's 23,000 students use Blackboard Learn.

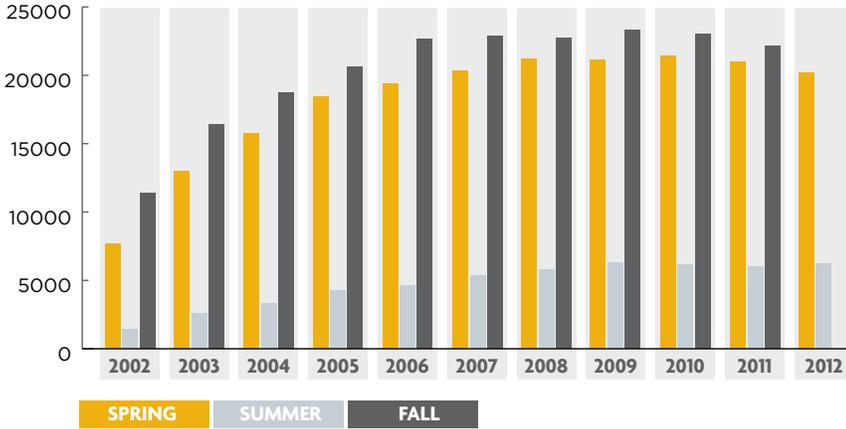
Not coincidentally, nearly 23,000 NIU users—mostly students—have downloaded Blackboard Mobile, which connects students and faculty to course information on the go. In the past year alone, NIU has counted nearly 640,000 logins to Blackboard coming from the mobile app.

This flurry of mobile activity proved to NIU that students were coming to their university expecting to access academic resources the same way they access everything else—via mobile devices. And as students demand more online and mobile courses, they also drive the use of synchronous and asynchronous learning options available with Blackboard Collaborate.

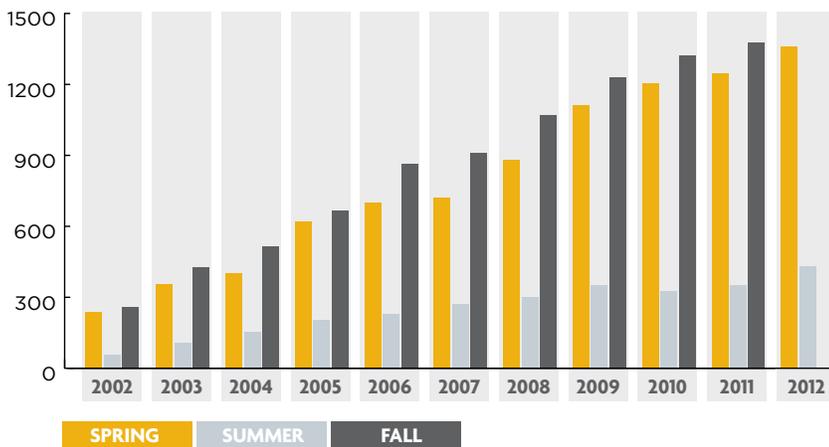
BY THE NUMBERS: BLACKBOARD LEARN AT NIU

At NIU, students are adopting Blackboard Learn in droves. And NIU faculty is using Blackboard to deliver efficient, effective instruction.

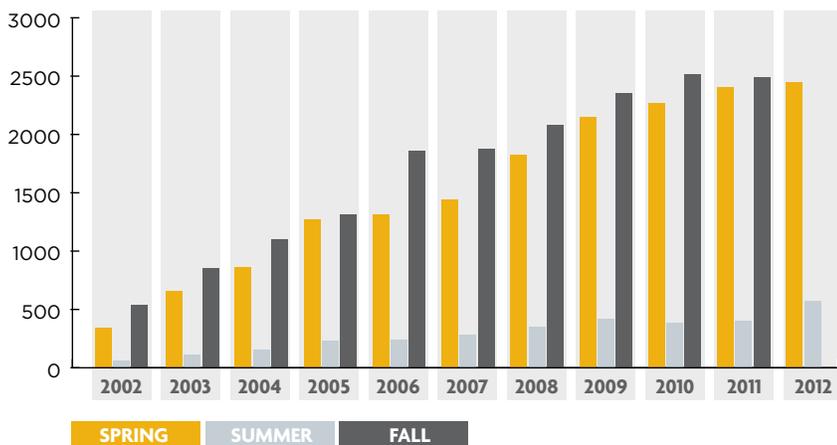
Use of Blackboard Learn by Individual Students



Use of Blackboard Learn by Individual Faculty/Staff



Number of Course Sections on Blackboard Learn



BLACKBOARD LEARN @ NIU

WEB-BASED TEACHING & LEARNING

CAPABILITIES

- Streamlined online environment
- Social learning tools
- Content management and sharing
- Outcomes measurement
- Open technology and database

BENEFITS

- Increased student engagement
- Improved educator efficiency
- Improved student outcomes
- Higher operational efficiency



“ We weave the best practices and pedagogy into training, which has become a faculty development model for other schools. Through Blackboard, faculty members can share resources so students come to class prepared for rich dialogue and a collaborative experience. It’s flipping the classroom. ”

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FACULTY DEVELOPMENT CENTERS FOCUS ON PROFICIENCY AND EFFICIENCY

Teaching active learners effectively with all this new technology can be a challenge for instructors, even—or maybe especially—for veterans who have years of experience teaching in a traditional lecture-and-test format. To engage active learners, instructors need technology that enables an interactive, always-available learning environment. And they need to know how use that technology well.

That’s the mission of NIU’s Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center, which for more than a decade has used Blackboard to teach instructors how to best to use Blackboard. “Our office is charged with showing faculty not only how to use the Blackboard tools, but why to use them,” explains Rhode.

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“Our training also focuses on how Blackboard benefits faculty,” continues Rhode “How it saves them time on grading and making assignments or distributing materials. This is time they then can spend on things they are passionate about like teaching and research.

“Like many institutions, we’ve faced funding cutbacks and been asked to do more with less. The efficiencies gained through Blackboard are a big part of making that possible,” Rhode says. “We use training courses to show how using these tools can help faculty meet their individual goals and the university’s overall goals.”

INSTRUCTORS DRIVE LEARNING TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION

NIU has around 1,500 faculty members and 800 teaching assistants. While instructors aren’t required to take the center’s faculty development courses, most do. In the 2011-12 academic year, more than 2,000 unique participants completed a workshop. This targeted training has resulted in widespread adoption of Blackboard; nearly 80 percent of NIU instructors use the learning management system to teach.

Instructor-to-instructor influence is starting to sway even some of the staunchest lecture-and-test holdouts. According to Rhode, NIU has reached a “tipping point,” where faculty adoption of Blackboard is being driven by instructors telling their peers to use the tools. “Faculty tell me that they didn’t know how they ever taught before there was Blackboard,” he says.

ONLINE, ON-DEMAND, AND MOBILE ACCESS FACILITATE TRAINING

In addition to face-to-face workshops, monthly faculty development sessions for faculty, staff, and teaching assistants are held online via Blackboard Collaborate. All sessions are archived and available for on-demand viewing 24/7, including as podcasts in iTunes for access from desktop, laptop, or mobile devices.

NIU faculty and graduate teaching assistants can choose to attend many of the professional development programs offered in a format at a time that best fits their needs. The online workshops are an ideal format for introducing new pedagogical or technological approaches and to foster online discussion. "Participants find the online workshops to be a fantastic example of effective synchronous collaboration and a model on which to pattern sessions with students," explains Rhode.

To date, the university has offered 80 separate online workshops attended by more than 600 NIU participants as well as faculty and staff from more than a dozen other institutions across the U.S. The archived sessions have become an invaluable as a convenient, on-demand resource that saves time and money.

BLACKBOARD COLLABORATE @ NIU

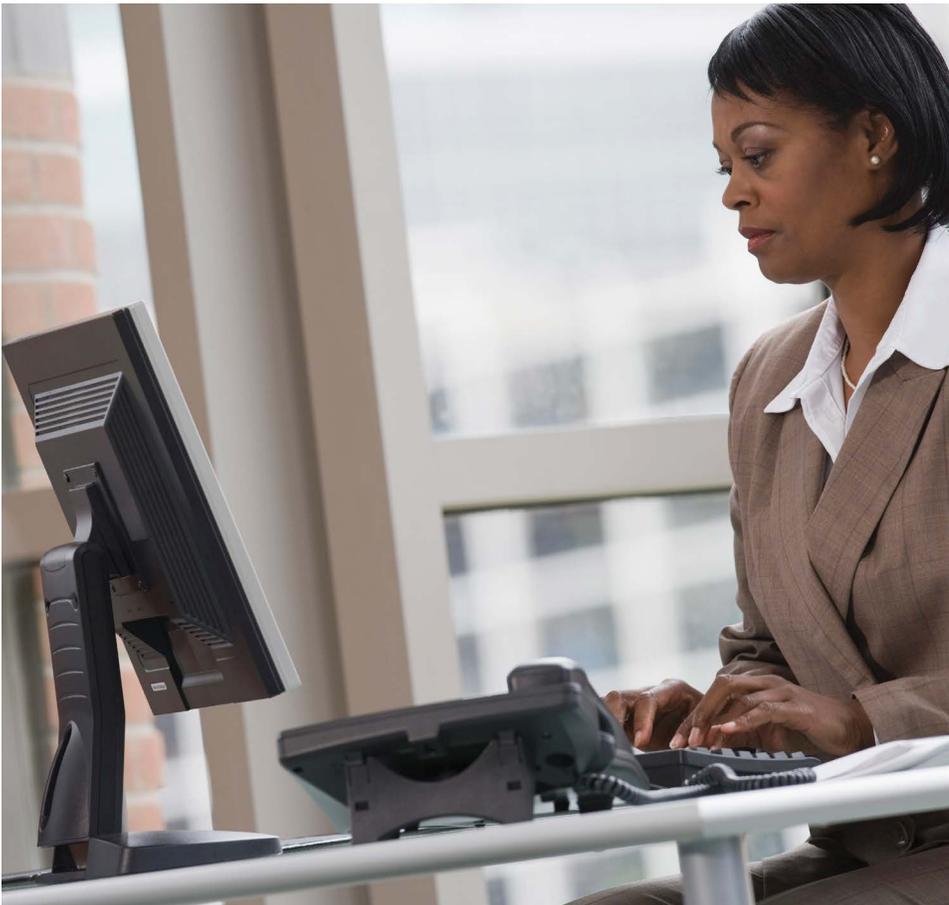
LIVE ENGAGEMENT

CAPABILITIES

- Live, engaging interaction
- Web conferencing and recording
- Mobile collaboration
- Instant messaging, content sharing
- Voice authoring

BENEFITS

- Improved student engagement
- Higher student satisfaction
- Increased educator efficiency
- Reduced costs



Blackboard
collaborate™

CONCLUSION

Driven by student requirements and armed with an integrated Blackboard solution, NIU is creating an active-learning environment that's accessible, flexible, and mobile. Key to this learning evolution, the university's faculty development program is also using Blackboard to turn out instructors who can teach today's active learners with tools and techniques that increase engagement and improve learning outcomes while increasing teacher productivity.



BLACKBOARD BONUSES

While Blackboard Learn, Blackboard Collaborate, and Blackboard Mobile have improved learning outcomes at NIU, the combined platform offers additional benefits, too. Here are a few examples:

The **Blackboard Learn** document-sharing features help the university move closer to its goal of cutting paper consumption and the millions of dollars it spends annually on printing.



Using **Blackboard Collaborate** to conduct training and meetings online helps NIU reduce the time, expense, and carbon emissions of travel.



Blackboard Mobile provides real-time academic information for students by sending Push Notifications as soon as new grades, announcements, or important course documents are

