

TAKING IT MOBILE: UNTETHERED LEARNING FOR TODAY'S STUDENTS

One of the most salient characteristics of learning in the 21st century is that it's no longer confined to the classroom, library, or even the weekday hours when school's in session.

Technology has taken many of the elements traditionally associated with higher education—physical classrooms, library stacks, office hours—and augmented, and often replaced, them with the virtual and digital. Students take classes online. Do research on the web. Email their instructors. Consult with the reference librarian via instant messaging. And armed with laptops, smartphones, and tablets, they do so whenever or wherever they want.



“ My definition of mobile learning is learning a variety of content and skills anytime, anyplace with a small device light enough to be carried in one hand. ”

CHRIS DEDE

Timothy E. Wirth Professor in Learning Technologies
Harvard University

TODAY'S MOBILE LEARNER

The development of the internet and mobile, near-ubiquitous access to it has resulted in a new breed of students. No longer content to sit passively in a classroom and absorb “knowledge,” they are becoming more active learners, approaching their education with the same expectations and demands they have in all aspects of their personal and work lives: access, immediacy, engagement, personalization, and mobility.

While this consumer-based approach to learning may seem threatening to those who have grown accustomed to (and content with) the traditional and time-tested modes of learning they grew up with, it is, in fact, rapidly becoming the face of today's higher education. And it stands to better prepare students for the realities of work and life in a diverse, global, interconnected, and always connected world. Employers value, and increasingly expect, that workers are fluent in the use of technology and able to collaborate across geographic, functional, and cultural boundaries. Graduates who cannot do so will be left behind in today's workplace.

Colleges and universities who ignore student demands for learning to become more technologically up to date and relevant to students' lives do so at their own peril. Students whose demands for technical relevance are not met will look elsewhere for their education. Rather than ignoring or tamping down demand to imbue learning with technology, colleges and universities across the spectrum—private and public, small and large, traditional and for-profit—are focusing on ways to meet their students' expectations and requirements for a technologically meaningful learning experience. Increasingly, that experience is untethered from campus.

“ We have seen double-digit growth yearly with use of mobile access to Blackboard Learn. Having a mobile collaboration app, such as Blackboard Collaborate mobile web conferencing, will be the icing on the cake for our campus to provide the innovative degree programs our students so richly deserve. ”

MARCEL BRECHTOLDT
System Admin Principal and
Senior Lecturer
University of Missouri-St. Louis



WHAT'S IMPACTING MOBILE LEARNING?

Expectation of anytime/anywhere access has become more pronounced in all aspects of life: work, socializing, entertainment, financial transactions, and learning. This is true for people of all ages. For the older generations, technology may play an important role in their lives, but that role is typically compartmentalized. For younger generations who've grown up in the age of the Internet, 24/7 access and connectivity is completely intertwined in their lives. Life, to a great extent, is lived online, and students are used to being in constant touch with and in the know about their friends and family. This desire to be constantly connected extends to their learning as well, as students check facts during lectures, check on missed assignments with classmates, collaborate in virtual study groups or project teams, or IM an instructor to clear up a question.

What's underlying all of this? For one, the prevalence of devices that enable being continuously connected.

Smartphones everywhere

In April 2013, comScore MobiLens reported that 133.7 million people in the U.S. owned smartphones (57% mobile market penetration) during the three months ending in February, up 8% since November. For college and university students, the figure is even higher. A new eMarketer report predicts that smartphone use by U.S. college students will increase from 67% in 2012 to nearly 90% for 2016 graduates. In fact, the rate of adoption for smartphones is far surpassing that of other consumer technologies. It is estimated that smartphones and tablets will be taken up by the market at ten times the rate of personal computers in the 1980s, twice as fast as Internet adoption in the 1990s, and three times faster than social networking took off in the first decade of this century.

With all of these mobile devices in hand, it's no surprise that students are more closely incorporating their use into their academic lives.

The growing number of non-traditional learners

While the rapidly growing adoption of smart technology is clearly driving demand for mobile learning, so is the increasing cohort of non-traditional learners.

In the Fall of 2011, The Atlantic Monthly, citing research from the National Center for Education Statistics, noted that of the nearly 18 million American undergraduates, only 15% were attending 4-year colleges and living on campus. These statistics may surprise those who associate "college" with a 20-year old crossing the sun-dappled, tree-lined quad:

- 17.6 million students are enrolled in higher education
- 43% attend two-year institutions
- 32% are working full time
- 37% are part-time students
- 25% are over the age of 30

Whether they're pursuing an undergraduate degree, professional certification, MBA or other advanced degree, many of today's students juggle work and family to attend class. The need for the flexibility that mobile access offers is accelerating.

Online learning continues to attract students

Technology has greatly facilitated learning opportunities for both traditional and non-traditional students. The Sloan Consortium tracks the adoption of online learning in higher education. In their January 2013 report, *Changing Course*, they reported that:

- Over 6.7 million—32% of all students—took at least one online course during the Fall of 2011, an increase of over 570,000 students from the previous year
- Online enrollment grew by 9.3% over the prior year, almost an order of magnitude greater than the 1% growth rate for the overall student population in higher ed
- As for results, 77% of academic leaders now rate learning outcomes in online education as the same or superior to those in face-to-face.

These numbers are impressive, especially as there are an increasing number of traditional, classroom-based courses that blend in aspects of online learning: holding courses in real time via the web during inclement weather or when the instructor is traveling, incorporating collaborative projects into their curriculum, bringing in guest lecturers. Whether traditional or virtual, the learning experience is online and mobile.

MOBILIZING HIGHER EDUCATION

Mobile access to online learning provides students—whether traditional or non-traditional, virtual or in-the-classroom learners—with the flexibility they require in today’s fast-paced and connected world. Mobilized students want to attend class and review materials from their mobile devices. They expect to find recordings of classes, study sessions, or other gatherings they missed or want to revisit from the places they’re most familiar with: LMS, iTunes U, YouTube.

But providing mobile access from the smartphones and tablets that are becoming ubiquitous among students does more than satisfy the demands of active, free-agent learners. It helps students develop the collaboration, communication, and team-work skills that the workplace demands. It prepares them for a work environment where the personal and professional are often blended, and where people are allowed to work schedules that are flexible in terms of both time and location in exchange for staying in contact when it’s needed.

As anyone who’s tried to access information or take care of a transaction on a site that’s not optimized for mobile devices knows, it’s not enough to just be accessible. Enabling students to learn online through a smartphone or tablet requires a mobile interface designed from the ground up. It also means ensuring that students who’ve gone mobile are

able to interact as full participants in a class or on a collaborative project. They should be able to see who else is in class, raise their hands, respond to polls, let the instructor know when they don’t understand a concept, and take part in breakout sessions. Mobile learning has to be as “real” and seamless as other learning, not an afterthought.

“ We are extremely pleased that Blackboard Collaborate, a key component to our online strategy, is accommodating our growing mobile device community with an excellent mobile product. Its deep integration with our eLearning suite will allow us to accommodate our eLearning live collaboration objectives. ”

ALLEN TAYLOR
CTO
Marshall University



Each year, the NMC Horizon Project identifies emerging technologies they believe will have a major impact in education over the coming five years, and ranks the trends that are key drivers of those technologies. In its NMC Horizon Report: 2012 Higher Education Edition, the highest ranked trend was mobility. The report noted:

PEOPLE EXPECT TO BE ABLE TO WORK, LEARN, AND STUDY WHENEVER AND WHEREVER THEY WANT TO.

Life in an increasingly busy world where learners must balance demands from home, work, school, and family poses a host of logistical challenges with which today's ever more mobile students must cope. Work and learning are often two sides of the same coin, and people want easy and timely access not only to the information on the network, but also to tools, resources, and up-to-the moment analysis and commentary. These needs, as well as the increasingly essential access to social media and networks, have risen to the level of expectations.

MOBILE LEARNING: PART OF THE ONLINE AND BLENDED LEARNING SOLUTION

Mobile learning doesn't happen in a vacuum or on a stand-alone basis. It's not simply a matter of an instructor posting a lecture recording on an LMS or a student IMing a classmate to check on an assignment. Mobile learning must be part of an overall learning solution that's built for online and blended learning. Through its work with thousands of educational institutions, Blackboard Collaborate has identified the capabilities that are required for successful online learning:

- **Web conferencing:** virtual classroom instruction, moderator-led meetings, structured collaboration, professional development
- **Mobile collaboration:** live participation in classes and meetings, and access to class materials and recordings, from a mobile device
- **Instant messaging:** office hours, educational support services, help desks, impromptu meetings and collaboration
- **Voice authoring:** enriched engagement by adding voice commentary, instruction, and personalized coaching to asynchronous elements of online learning

All seamlessly integrated through LMS integration.

What makes online learning really work?

The features and capabilities incorporated in Blackboard Collaborate are governed by a set of principles about what's required for a learning and collaboration solution used in an educational environment. These are creating a solution that is:

- **Specifically designed for education** by educators, with capabilities that keep students alert and involved, and enable instructors to assess outcomes—capabilities less vital for a system designed for corporate presentations and repositioned for use in the classroom.
- **Accessible to all learners**, including those with different learning styles or with physical and cognitive disabilities. An accessible solution will offer close captioning, screen reader capabilities, and navigation alternatives.
- **Seamlessly integrated with learning management systems** so students can easily check schedules, financial information, assignments, and grades through whatever LMS their school uses.
- **Highly engaging to students**, with audio and video and opportunities for hands-on student interaction that's not limited to desktops and laptops, but available on mobile devices as well.
- **Able to ensure that strategic goals are met** with the help of a professional services staff with a background in and commitment to education.

Untethering learning

Wherever they are, students want to be able to participate in real-time classes and collaboration sessions from their mobile devices. To check on course status and grades. To seek out and communicate with classmates and instructors. To review class materials and recordings.

Offering an innovative approach to learning that fully supports this type of flexibility is an increasingly important way for institutions to demonstrate they truly understand today's students. In a world in which students have so many learning alternatives, colleges and universities that provide a mobile-enabled infrastructure are enhancing their ability to attract and retain students.

A central element of mobile-enabled infrastructure is support for collaboration. Blackboard Collaborate is the only collaboration solution designed expressly for education. It offers a comprehensive, open learning platform for higher education, as well as for K-12 and corporate learning. Its capabilities support a wide spectrum of collaboration, enabling a variety of ways for students, faculty, and administrators to communicate, interact, and truly engage with one another whether they're sitting at their desk, or fully untethered and connecting with a mobile device.

There's no going back: today's students are mobile. Colleges and universities must recognize this and act on it. •

HOW STUDENTS LEVERAGE MOBILE LEARNING

- Attend class remotely
- Conduct Internet-based research
- Collaborate on class projects
- Take notes or record lectures to refer back to later
- Take videos of class presentations or experiments for later study
- Access online textbooks
- Communicate with classmates (via email, IM, or text message)
- Communicate with instructors (via email, IM, or text message)
- Receive reminders or alerts about assignments and exams
- Access LMS to check schedules, grades, assignments, etc.
- Organize work
- Review the recording of a missed class through their LMS
- Share and edit calendars or organize bookmarks
- Create or share documents, videos, or podcasts
- Coordinate calendars with classmates or share bookmarked websites
- Get IT, library, and other support

HOW INSTRUCTORS LEVERAGE MOBILE LEARNING

- Expand reach of classroom to students on mobile devices
- Capture lectures
- Distribute recordings through LMS, iTunes U, and YouTube
- Collaborate with peers on research projects
- Attend professional development sessions and faculty meetings

For more information about how you can incorporate mobile web conferencing into your eLearning strategy, visit bbcollaborate.com/mobile or contact us at collaboratesales@blackboard.com.

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