Law School Transcends Classroom Boundaries through Video

Georgetown University Law Center fosters student growth by integrating WebEx technology into classrooms and curricula.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Customer Name: Georgetown University Law Center

Industry: Higher education

Location: Washington, D.C.

Number of Employees: More than 100 full-time faculty

Challenge:
· Provide educational and business continuity in event of disaster or pandemic
· Extend traditional educational offerings to remote, off-campus students
· Facilitate research and collaboration among geographically dispersed academics

Solution:
· Faculty members schedule and conduct online classes without IT assistance
· Interactive features let students adopt passive or participatory learning style
· High-quality video allows university to bring remote experts into classroom

Results:
· Eliminated setup and equipment required by former video conferencing solution
· Used distance learning to transcend physical boundaries of campus and reduce carbon footprint
· Helped ensure academic activities can continue even when campus itself is closed

Challenge

Founded in 1870 and located at the foot of Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., the Georgetown University Law Center has grown into one of the largest and most prestigious law schools in the country. Consistently ranked among the top U.S. law schools by *U.S. News and World Report* and other publications, Georgetown Law is home to more than 100 full-time faculty members and upwards of 2000 students.

As chief information officer for the institution, Pablo Molina is charged with promoting the intelligent use of technology among its diverse community of faculty and student users. "For years, we've been using audio and video to record classes when professors haven't been able to make it to campus," says Molina. "But that wasn't enough. We didn't have any system in place that truly allowed us to conduct classes online. We wanted students and faculty to be able to attend meetings and lectures in real time, regardless of their physical location. And we wanted them to be able to participate in those sessions just as if they were in a brick-and-mortar classroom."

The law school was already considering online meeting and training solutions when the threat of a global pandemic suddenly made web conferencing a necessity. The university was committed to finding a way to help ensure that education could continue even if the threatening H1N1 virus did develop into a pandemic in the summer of 2009.

Solution

"Reliability, scalability, functionality, and ease of use were our most important criteria, and Cisco WebEx technology consistently rose to the top in all four areas," says Molina. "The software was intuitive enough that both students and faculty would be able to start using it immediately, and it offered all of the key interactive features that we required such as document sharing, chat, polling, and more." He was particularly impressed by the high-quality video and audio that Cisco WebEx® Meeting Center provided. "Compared to other video conferencing technologies, WebEx provides the most lifelike face-to-face interaction," Molina adds.

> "I believe that being proficient in web conferencing tools is a critical skill for all students to have. That's why we now build WebEx technology into students' credentials, giving them the appropriate toolset to succeed in today's business world."

Pablo Molina
Chief Information Officer
Georgetown University Law Center

It was also important that the web conferencing solution integrate easily with both the school's Cisco® Unified Communications network and hardware infrastructure, as well as with software such as Microsoft Exchange. Cisco WebEx technology qualified on both counts, so Molina and his team began an accelerated deployment.

WebEx proved its usefulness within weeks. "The main driver for implementing WebEx technology was to prepare for a potential swine flu epidemic," says Molina. "We soon discovered, however, that faculty members were very inspired by the technology. They can now bring in colleagues from all over the world without having to consult months in advance and make travel arrangements. This allows them to bring many new points of view to their academic sessions."

Students, too, are excited by the technology, as Molina himself discovered when he took advantage of Cisco WebEx technology to conduct a class from Egypt when he was invited to deliver a speech to the United Nations. "This was an exciting opportunity that I didn't want to pass up," he says, "but I still had an obligation to my students. With WebEx technology, I was able to hold my class from halfway around the world, and the feedback from students was wonderful."

Results

Although in the past it would have been impossible to procure enough rooms, equipment, and technicians to videotape classes in the event of a disaster, today the distance learning afforded by Cisco WebEx technology means that education can continue without disruption. Online meetings also allow remote faculty to participate in critical decision-making meetings without having to travel overseas. "Thanks to WebEx technology, instructors in London were able to participate and vote in a highly important faculty meeting for the first time ever."

According to Molina, Cisco WebEx solutions offer significant productivity enhancements as well. "The flexibility we achieve with WebEx technology removes restrictions of time and space," he says. "By opening up online learning, we increase the academic productivity of both faculty and students." This flexibility also means that Georgetown Law can extend its traditional programs to nontraditional learners, such as those with full-time jobs, and offer interactive instruction suited to a variety of learning styles.

The law school can sustain those benefits while at the same time reducing environmental impact. "It's important for us to provide technology services that minimize travel," says Molina. "Not only does that save time and money, but it reduces our carbon footprint as well."

The software-as-a-service (SaaS) model employed by Cisco WebEx technology also offers benefits to the law school. "Like most academic institutions these days, the Law Center is striving to run more efficient IT operations," says Molina. "With WebEx technology, we don't have to install, patch, or maintain our servers, or figure out optimal configurations. Our only responsibility is to facilitate campuswide adoption and support."

Recognizing the value that web conferencing tools provide, Molina has now made it a requirement for his graduate students to present project proposals through

the Cisco WebEx platform. Not only does this let students and traveling instructors participate in the session from any location, it also allows students to view the recorded session and evaluate their own presentation. "I believe that being proficient in web conferencing tools is a critical skill for all students to have," he says. "That's why we now build WebEx technology into students' credentials, giving them the appropriate toolset to succeed in today's business world."

Next Steps

Molina fully expects that the Georgetown University Law Center will continue to use Cisco WebEx solutions to extend its reach and improve its academic offerings. "With the flexibility gained through the school's adoption of WebEx solutions, Georgetown Law will be able to transcend physical boundaries and provide new academic opportunities."

For More Information

· To find out more about Cisco WebEx, go to: http://www.cisco.com/go/webex.

· To read other success stories, go to: http://www.cisco.com/go/webexcasestudies.

· To provide feedback or participate in the Cisco WebEx customer reference program, email: real.results@webex.com.

Product List

Collaboration Solutions
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· Cisco WebEx Meeting Center

· Cisco WebEx Training Center

Voice and Unified Communications
· Cisco Unity®

· Cisco Unified Communications Manager

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