Business School Deploys
Collaborative Learning Application

Babson College deploys new web-conferencing technology to prepare students
for careers in business.

Executive Summary

Babson College
- **Industry:** Higher Education
- **Location:** Wellesley, Massachusetts
- **Student Population:** 3,300

CHALLENGE
- Reduce burden of IT staff
- Give students more collaborative and engaging web-conferencing solution

SOLUTION
- Deploy Cisco WebEx for enhanced, collaborative teaching and learning

RESULTS
- Saves students time and money by reducing need to travel
- Significantly reduced operating expenses
- IT staff can now reallocate time and attention to other pressing issues

Challenge

Babson College is a small, private business school located outside of Boston in Wellesley, Massachusetts. Ranked as having the world's leading entrepreneurship education program, the college annually enrolls 3,300 students from more than 70 countries across the globe, working towards degrees in business administration, accounting, management, and finance.

With much of today's business being conducted online, Babson offers a blended approach to learning. The college conducts many of its courses both on campus and online, utilizing synchronous and asynchronous methods, and aims to provide its students with a tangible experience that prepares them for real-world, enterprise-driven environments.

Babson's blended curriculum enables students traveling from remote locations across the state and the globe to virtually attend classes and complete assignments, a particular advantage as the winter months in Massachusetts can bring snow and ice that cause road closures and travel disruptions and delays. Realizing the benefits of the blending learning approach, Babson conducted an evaluation of the online learning technology that it was using and determined that the existing web-conferencing system was insufficient, and it needed to increase both the reliability and performance to meet increasing demand.

"The web-conferencing technology we were using was putting too much strain on our IT department, requiring extensive maintenance and support to maintain network connectivity," says Eric Palson, director of instructional technologies at Babson College. "We needed a more innovative platform, capable of reducing the burden of the IT staff, while offering our students a more collaborative and engaging web-conferencing solution."

Solution

After evaluating its options, Babson College determined that a large portion of its community had experience using Cisco WebEx®, a web-conferencing tool that enables on-demand virtual meetings and high-quality videoconferencing applications. The college further recognized that deploying WebEx would involve less of a learning curve for its faculty, staff, and students.

Cisco® WebEx helps enable real-time collaboration, where online courses and meetings are held over the web, anywhere, anytime, on any device. Because many corporate entities use WebEx to connect geographically-dispersed individuals for day-to-day meetings and operations, Babson found that the platform would provide the same benefits for its students. Additionally, the college saw using WebEx as a way to better prepare students for the technology they will encounter in the business world.

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The WebEx solution has allowed Babson faculty to hold full class-wide lectures and discussions online. The technology additionally allows faculty to use the platform for small group meetings, to bring in guest lecturers from remote locations, and for holding office hours for students who may not live on campus or for those who have scheduling conflicts with on-site office hours. Faculty and students can also access high-quality video features via WebEx, allowing them to experience virtual face-to-face discussions for more active engagement, or for more personally addressing any key issues students may be experiencing with courses or assignments.

Using the college's previous web-conferencing platform, faculty and students were limited to the types of documents they were able to share in classes held online. Cisco WebEx has expanded virtual sharing capabilities, as the system allows its users to upload any type of file, enabling professors and students to share presentations and ideas constructed in PowerPoint, Word, Excel, PDF, and other file formats.

"Everything from the simplified deployment, to the audio quality, to the ease of use of the interface, and video and mobile capabilities make Cisco WebEx a more robust and capable solution," says David Foscaldo, associate director of media and productions services at Babson College. "Students and faculty no longer have to prepare in advance for potential issues in connecting to their online classes. They can quickly log in to WebEx using phone or Internet connection without ever missing a beat."

Results

With Cisco WebEx, Babson College is able to provide its students with a more engaging and interactive learning experience. Because of its ease of use, the solution has made faculty more accessible to the student community and has thereby enhanced student productivity.

With the high-performance, user-friendly WebEx solution, the college's IT department has saved countless hours that would otherwise be required on the previous web-conferencing platform to maintain the system and help enable the community to access courses and discussions virtually. As a result, IT staff can now allocate their time and attention to other pressing issues.

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Product List

Voice and IP Communications
- Cisco WebEx

Massachusetts' often harsh winter weather no longer hinders the students' ability to learn either. During one snowstorm alone, courses were held over Cisco WebEx and saved students thousands of dollars collectively, as they were able to attend class virtually, rather than having to face travel delays while commuting from remote parts of the state in inclement weather to attend class. Using the technology during inclement weather in the future will further save the students time and money. It will also save the college thousands of dollars for operational expenses associated with utility services needed to open the school in a snowstorm, in addition to reducing safety concerns associated with having its community travel in inclement weather.

"The number-one reason to go to business school is to network with likeminded individuals to create new opportunities and future growth," says Palson. "When students can't meet in person to connect, network, and collaborate, they have the opportunity to do that online through WebEx, further paving the way for Babson College students to become the business leaders of tomorrow."

For More Information

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