



East Carolina University Brings a World of Fresh Perspectives Into the Classroom With Saba Classroom.

Industry: Higher Education

Use Case: Virtual Learning, Video and Web Conferencing



“ We’ve been able to create a community of learners with Saba Classroom. Because we can see and hear one another, it creates a social presence that distance education has lacked in the past. ”

Elizabeth Hodge, Professor, College of Education, East Carolina University

CHALLENGES BEFORE SABA IMPLEMENTATION

Provide a classroom-like environment with rich interactivity, collaboration and engaging social connections, regardless of the distance or time differences between the faculty and students

BENEFITS

- Offers a learning environment equivalent to a physical classroom experience
- Facilitates more effective collaborative learning and social interaction among students
- Builds a sense of community between ECU and nontraditional students
- Provides an effective, adaptable platform for exploring global perspectives and addressing worldwide issues
- Promotes collaboration without borders

In 1907, East Carolina University (ECU) was founded to alleviate a shortage of teachers in the North Carolina area. Today, ECU is recognized as an emerging national research university that is one of the fastest-growing institutions in the North Carolina university system – with a total enrollment of nearly 28,000 students and approximately 200 undergraduate, graduate and professional degree programs.

ECU has been a recognized leader in distance education for more than 50 years and was among the first schools in the United States to offer online or virtual higher-education degree programs. Relying on Blackboard as its Web-based course management system, the university’s distance-education program serves a far-flung group of students living hundredsof miles from the main campus in Greenville, North Carolina.



This program became wildly popular at ECU and attracted students who normally wouldn't be able to attend the university because of their distance from campus. As ECU expanded its distance-education program, the university recognized that to provide the same kind of engaging interactivity and social atmosphere that exists in a traditional classroom environment, it needed a way to offer real-time audio, live interactive video, instant sharing of desktops, easy-to-use whiteboards and markup tools, and more to make virtual classes as effective as face-to-face sessions.

"We had been hearing that students just did not feel connected," explained John Southworth, Saba Classroom administrator for Academic Computing. "Because they were unable to come to campus and sit in a classroom with the professor and fellow students, many didn't feel like they were part of the university."

CREATING CONNECTED COMMUNITIES OF LEARNERS

Saba Classroom changed the classroom experience at ECU. In 2006, ECU introduced the Saba's Web conferencing platform – a highly interactive, easily managed eLearning solution that provides a real classroom environment for distance education. The powerful, adaptable platform integrates real-time video and audio to enable teachers and students to hear and see one another during discussions. Students can also click on emoticons to raise their hands, applaud, laugh, or respond to yes-or-no questions.

"We have been pleased to add Saba Classroom as a learning tool at ECU," said Elmer Poe, assistant vice chancellor for Emerging Academic Initiatives at ECU. "It is the perfect complement to our primary learning platform, Blackboard, and offers faculty and students ways to communicate and collaborate that expand the horizons of online learning."

ECU is now able to connect students from all over the globe, while promoting collaboration without borders. No matter how far the distance, Saba Classroom allows classrooms to share knowledge, have group discussion forums and lectures, and learn together, all without leaving the comfort of the classroom walls. "I feel like we've been able to create a community of learners with Saba Classroom," said Elizabeth Hodge, a professor in the College of Education. "Because we can see and hear one another, it creates a social presence that distance education has lacked in the past."

ESTABLISHING A GLOBAL FORUM FOR LEARNING

Climate change is a topic that has attracted considerable interest from the worldwide scientific community. In 2010, the U.S. State Department tasked ECU to create an interactive course on the subject with leading universities around the world.

Students and faculty from ECU were joined by their colleagues at Shandong University in China, Faculdade Jaguariuna in Brazil and the University of Jammu in India. Using Saba Classroom's highly interactive Web-based learning environment, students and their instructors explored the complex scientific, societal, technological and policy challenges involved in the climate change discussion.

“It was exciting to see how the realistic classroom environment encouraged collaboration among students from different cultural backgrounds and different life experiences in countries thousands of miles apart. With Saba Classroom, students were able to explore climate change and work together in international groups to create innovative solutions to the many challenges posed by climate change.”

Rosana Ferreira, Professor of the Global Climate Change course

The platform helped the universities connect, regardless of distance, language barriers, differences in bandwidth availability and connectivity issues. ECU uses Saba Classroom’s Voice over IP (VoIP) technology that relies on the Web for all audio, with a choice of various quality levels. This economical solution allows ECU and its partner schools around the world to connect via VoIP, traditional phone teleconferencing, or a combination of the two — at whatever bandwidths make sense for a particular country.

“Course acceptance has been rapid and enthusiastic,” said Southworth. “The class passed its pilot test in 2010 with distinction, and is now being offered as part of the regular curriculum at ECU. We are also planning to invite more universities to join in the discussion in the future.”

BREAKING BARRIERS OF TIME AND DISTANCE

Saba’s Web conferencing platform has eliminated many international classroom barriers, including time and distance, for those enrolled in the Global Climate Change course. Saba Classroom has also been especially helpful for busy professionals who want to return to ECU for graduate degrees, but often have scheduling constraints due to work agendas, business travel or family commitments.

All distance education courses supported by Saba Classroom are recorded, so it’s easy for students to make up a session that was missed or quickly and efficiently review lectures and course materials to prepare for exams.

While Saba Classroom is user-friendly and intuitive to manage, Southworth and his team have consistently provided comprehensive, highly responsive support. “We tell our faculty, ‘You’re in a session to teach – we’ll take care of the technical details,’” commented Southworth. “We’ve been able to quickly get more and more faculty members comfortable with the tools that make for a rewarding interactive, classroom-like distance-learning experience.”

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