The Challenge:
Quickly deploy a learning solution to create a consistent experience for students, regardless of where they take class.

Air University Soars to New Heights with the Blackboard® Solution™

When The Wright Brothers established the first U.S. civilian flying school in Montgomery, Ala., in 1910, they had no idea that almost a century later their foresight would provide the foundation for what is known as today's intellectual center for airpower education at Air University (AU). Air University is a major component of the Air Education and Training Command (AETC), providing programs for more than 19 institutions and organizations that cumulatively enroll tens of thousands of students annually. Even for forward-thinkers such as Orville and Wilbur, it might be hard to imagine a professional military education program for the air and space industry, delivered from afar, that incorporates dynamic curriculum, multimedia, and online interactions. Not so for the top command at Air University.

"The choice to implement a new technology solution to facilitate distance learning programs was driven from the top, starting with the AU Commander, Lt. Gen. Lorenz," said Wayne Glass, IT specialist at Air University.

"Even though AETC had an active license with another learning system, AU Commander, Lt. Gen Lorenz chose Blackboard for its strong reputation throughout the DOD (Department of Defense) as being a more robust system."

Overall, Air University wanted to create a consistent learning experience, regardless of where students took classes. More specifically, the education and leadership center—that serves students from around the world—wanted the ability to design curriculum, better manage the enrollment and registration process, and determine how courses needed to be delivered through IT and business rules.

"We had to make a mad dash to meet these objectives," Glass said. "And, because this was such a highly visible project, there was a lot of added pressure to implement well because Air University is such a big player in Air Force training and distance learning."

Demonstrated Expertise is a Must for Quick and Easy Deployment
Blackboard had already built a solid relationship with the Air Force Institute of Technology (AFIT), a component of Air University and AETC, by implementing solutions that had very high adoptions rates. Since Air University supported AFIT's programs, the selection of the Blackboard Solution seemed like a natural fit.

Because Blackboard Consulting had experience with some of the largest clients in the DOD and possessed exceptional expertise in data integration, they were able to craft a solution that could be easily and quickly deployed—and one that addressed both Air University's requirements and DOD guidelines as well.

Successful Implementation Comes with Phased Approach
According to Glass, Blackboard's turnaround time to build a successful program of this magnitude took less than one year. The Blackboard team facilitated the deployment by using a phased approach that enabled Air University to better manage the implementation internally.

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In June 2007, Air University rolled out its new learning system for 8,000 users. The system, implemented using the Blackboard Learn™ platform, was first used by one of Air University's professional military education schools, The Air Command and Staff College (ACSC), for distance learning and master's degree initiatives. ACSC's master's program, at the time, was the first online master's course of its kind in the Air Force.

By implementing the Blackboard Learn platform, which seamlessly provides course delivery, content management, and community engagement, Air University assembled a powerful and unique learning platform configured to the needs of the institution as well as those of enrolling students. According to Glass, "Air University already had access through AFIT, but the university wanted to springboard off of that and license their own community portal. It made sense to upgrade to the Blackboard Learn platform and transition from an on-premise environment to a hosted model as well."

Those moves paid off for Air University.

"The response to the roll-out was immediate," Glass said. "In the first six months, 3,100 people enrolled in the program. This was a fantastic start and one that exceeded our expectations."

Based on this success, the system was then expanded to other schools and centers under the Air University umbrella.

More Than Just Technology, Service and Support Bring Value Too

Air University has realized a number of signficant benefits since the launch of the Blackboard solution. Among them:

- An easy-to-use and easy-to-administer learning system;

- A manageable deployment approach that ensures on-time and rapid implementation throughout the Air University network of schools and centers; and

- A true platform for teaching and learning that facilitates the training and development programs offered through Air University.

However, the value of Blackboard's role in the Air University implementation goes far beyond the capabilities of the technology itself. The service and support offered through the Blackboard team paid big dividends as well.

Examples of the service and support the Blackboard team provided to Air University:

- Worked to integrate the Air University portal with the Blackboard Learn platform, providing users with single sign-on access in one system;

- Created a password expiration feature to help Air University comply with existing U.S. Air Force password regulations;

- Enabled authentication for Common Access Cards (CAC) that provides direct log-in authentication for users accessing DOD computers, networks and databases;

- Designed an automated data integration feature with custom upload; and

- Built a real-time, customized reporting solution.

To learn more about Blackboard, visit www.Blackboard.com or call (888) 719-6123.

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