



CCC Confer Facilitates Teaching, Learning, and Meeting for 109 Campuses with Real-time Interactive Web Conferencing

By Blaine Morrow, Director, CCC Confer

The largest higher education system in the world, the California Community College System provides educational, vocational, and transfer programs to more than 2.5 million students on 109 campuses. At CCC Confer, our job is to be the collaboration resource for 50,000 faculty, staff, and administrators, providing anywhere, anytime Web conferencing with the simplest available technology.



Initially funded in 2001 with a five-year \$11.5 million grant, the project focuses on online instruction, as well as student-centered services that include online tutoring, counseling, and library services. Usage has grown phenomenally, and as a result, the CCC Confer project was renewed for 5 years in 2006.

Implementing New Educational Technology

In 2006, we conducted an extensive evaluation and competitive bid process to select a Web conferencing vendor, using close to 20 different points as a rubric for grading the products. Our goals for the project included expanding our user community, increasing the use of online learning by full-time faculty, conducting joint webinars and conferences, and integrating seamlessly into the CCC Confer portal.

While several companies did very well and were competitively priced, we felt Elluminate offered more unique tools that contributed directly to instruction. In the end, we selected Elluminate *Live!* for its high-quality participant experience, ease of use, ADA compliance, session archiving, and audio capabilities that include VoIP as well as support for a phone bridge and teleconferencing.

Switching to a new product is never easy. Implementation involved mass email notifications as well as group and individual training that's still in process. While we continue to work on some elements, portal integration went well. Elluminate's SDK APIs allowed us to customize, but we are still making modifications. It's a complex process, and although it hasn't been seamless, most users can't tell the difference when ordering meetings. For the most part, it's been painless for the user.

Mapping the Technology to the Educational Model

I'm a believer in Chickering and Gamson's Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education. With our new Web conferencing technology, six out of the seven principles have specific tools directly associated with them. In the future, we hope to have functionality that will correlate with the remaining principle. The following table shows how Chickering and Gamson's principles are reinforced by the educational technology tool.

Chickering and Gamson's Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education	Live eLearning and Web Collaboration Technology
1. Student/faculty interaction	Two-way audio, public/private chat, polling, quiz manager, whiteboard, video, emotion/activity indicators, hand raising, announcements, Web tour
2. Student/student collaboration	Breakout rooms, private chat, whiteboard
3. Active learning	Whiteboard, breakout rooms, application sharing, taking control of desktop, clickable URLs (chat, whiteboard), file transfer, synchronized Web tour, graphing calculator, math symbol library
4. Prompt feedback	Polling, quiz manager, two-way audio, public/private chat
5. Time on task	Clock/activity timer
6. Communication of high expectations	Still teacher-supplied
7. Accommodation of diverse learning styles	Voice, text, application sharing, multimedia, synchronized notes, closed captioning, recordings, accelerator keys, user-controlled interface layout, centralized user preferences, ADA 508 compliance

Practice Makes Perfect

I thought that introducing new tools and a different interface would be challenging. What we really have is like a Swiss Army knife. If you look at it from the perspective of a teacher walking into a new classroom, there's a lot more than a blackboard with chalk. It can be overwhelming. Confronted with all the tools at once, most instructors would say the technology's too complicated.

That's not our approach. We provide a few simple tools and encourage instructors to experiment and try other tools as they go along. We give them a "sand box," a training area on our home page where they can play with the tools. It always takes practice. That's what teaching is all about. Do it, do it some more, and you improve. When I work with instructors, I always keep those seven principles in mind, hoping in the end for a better student experience.

Investing in Technology that Works

What we've been able to do is a tribute to people in the system office who understood that the individual colleges couldn't afford all the expensive meetings, travel, and phone bills. So it was decided to implement this technology on a system level for the benefit of all 109 campuses.

When we make an education technology decision for an entire system, we almost never know whether it's going to work. This turned out to be one technology investment that does. It saves an incredible amount of money and time, it's used, and it grows faster than bread mold. No one college could experience the same benefit doing it alone.

This project is one of the good educational technology stories, and there aren't many of them. Usually, the results are things you can't measure. Here we can say people are meeting, are happy, are conducting classes, and keep coming back. This is an investment that makes sense. If you are a college it's a great investment. If you are a system of colleges, this is a tremendous investment. It's the one to make.

Blaine Victor Morrow is Director of CCC Confer and 3C Media Solutions, two statewide technology projects serving the California Community College system. He has been a technology director, university instructor, and an academic outreach coordinator. Blaine has written four books and 30 journal articles related to educational technology.

This article was originally published in the Community College Week Fall Technology Update in November 2007.