



Pima Community College: Removing Economic Barriers to Education

Pima Community College serves a diverse community of learners that rely upon online connectivity to achieve their academic success. As such, they are deeply committed to their students by discovering innovative ways to lower costs while continuing to provide a high quality education to students, regardless of the barriers they face, whether economic, location, or personal schedule.

AT A GLANCE

Student Number: 44,000+

Interviewees:

- Carlos Carrillo, Director of Learning Management Systems and Services
- Michael Amick, VP of Distance Education
- Jan Kempster, Dean of Distance Education



REORGANIZATION OF ONLINE LEARNING

The story of Pima Community College's evolution into next generation online learning began by identifying the needs of their community. Pima operates 6 campuses that serve the county and population area around Tucson, Arizona. Students face a number of challenges when trying to access education. Some are located in remote, rural areas. Others face economic challenges or have busy schedules with work and family. For these types of students, education is key to transforming their earning power and career path, which in turn can impact the community as a whole. To meet the diverse needs of its students and community, Pima's mission is to provide an education that is flexible, affordable, and effective, that in turn supports student success.

In order to fulfill their mission, Carlos Carrillo, Director of Learning Management Systems and Services, looked to technology to enhance Pima's online learning environment to improve offerings and increase enrolment in their programs in order to reach more students, regardless of age, location, personal schedule, or economic situation.

"We needed an LMS that could provide a reliable environment for our students. Brightspace has definitely been that."

Carlos Carrillo, Director of Learning Management Systems and Services, Pima Community College

THE INITIATIVE FOR OPEN EDUCATION RESOURCES

As part of the fulfillment of the Achieving the Dream, OER Initiative Grant, Pima has completed work on 20 online courses that utilize Open Education Resources (OER). As such, students can complete an associate in Liberal Arts in a fully online program that has no costs for textbooks. This can potentially save students over \$2,500 in textbook costs that would normally be associated with that program. To date students have saved \$409,000 in textbook costs from courses utilizing OER materials. Soon, Michael Amick, Vice President of Distance Education estimates that savings will reach \$1M, which is a huge factor for student success.

“Students can bring their interests to the course. Topics students choose can become the focus of assignments or discussion, all in the same platform.”

Jan Kempster, Dean of Distance Education, Pima Community College

This is one of the major areas where Pima has found an innovative solution to providing accessible education. But they also achieve greatness in innovative course development as well. One of the history courses built in Brightspace won the eLearning course of the year from the Instruction Technology Council.

STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING

Pima students benefit from the ability to bring personal experiences and interests to their education. Class discussions have become places where students can express and share their reflections with instructors and peers. This is uniquely relevant to their student population that is skewed to a more mature age group, who benefit from being able to take their course work into the real world. The learning management system provides students with an environment where they can upload, link, share news items, social media posts, etc. to enrich their education and align with learning outcomes.

“Students can bring their interests to the course. Topics students choose can become the focus of assignments or discussion, all in the same platform,” said Jan Kempster, Dean of Distance Education

THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON ENROLMENT

After a few years of declining enrolment, things have turned around. Michael reports that there has been a positive shift in enrolment numbers, meaning more students are able to benefit from an education than ever before. Jan Kempster, Dean of Distance Education attributes the growth in enrolment to a number of reasons, stating, “better mentoring of faculty and better oversight of quality are major factors. As well, more consistency in the courses in Brightspace.”

“Every faculty member, regardless of the modality of the course, you have a Brightspace shell. That was huge for us.”

*Jan Kempster, Dean of Distance Education,
Pima Community College*

EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT RESPONSE

Each year, Pima extends a survey that allows students to provide feedback on all aspects of their online program, from instructors, finance, course offerings, and as well, the technology they use. For the second time in a row, students report that the most important thing in their online learning experience has been



the reliability of Brightspace. On top of that, students responded that the reliability of their LMS was what they were most satisfied with in their online education experience.

“We are concerned with the stress students face using technology. Brightspace is reliable and consistent, which defers the stress,” said Michael Amick

CONNECTING STUDENTS WITH CAREERS

Pima is currently engaging with business partners in the region to help provide students with critical job opportunities. Companies are coming to them to look for students that are specifically trained and prepared for positions. As educational partners, Pima is either providing course creation services, or helping companies develop courses that target the exact skills and proficiencies that are required. Using data drawn from Brightspace, Pima is able to share student progress and insight into course completion rates that allow companies a better overview of how effective their course offerings have been at educating potential future employees. This kind of synergy between education and employers is poised to give students a leg up in achieving their life and career goals. And of course, this means that Pima is demonstrating its deep commitment towards its community and supporting its mission of student success.

INTRODUCING ACCESSIBLE VIDEO LEARNING

Video learning is a key advantage for students in an online environment. This is particularly true when studying languages. By actually seeing and hearing instructional material, students have more of a one-on-one experience with their instructors and course material. However, being able to provide a real time video experience was something that Pima wanted to extend to its students.

Prior to adopting Bongo, Pima was using a variety of video tools to connect students and instructors in real time. However, they discovered issues with accessibility and needed a video learning solution that could provide recorded videos with captioning, among other things. They also needed a system that could be used consistently across all courses, which is hugely important to help new and mature students adapt to technology that they might be using for the first time.

“Students talk to each other and talk to the instructor. It’s valuable having a consistent video tool across all courses integrated into Brightspace.”

*Jan Kempster, Dean of Distance Education,
Pima Community College*

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Michael Amick, VP of Distance Education, Pima Community College

THE BENEFITS OF CONTINUOUS DELIVERY

Because D2L offers continuous delivery, monthly updates provide Carlos and his team with a number of benefits. They are able to get ahead of issues before they impact the system negatively. They are better able to administer the change management process to ensure that changes can be adopted with more ease among faculty and students. Carlos explains that, “having a better process in place for change management greatly reduces risk.” It’s incredibly important that changes to the LMS don’t interrupt student success, which is why having a technology and education partner that understands the unique needs of education helps in mitigating that risk.

“D2L was quick to respond to changes we needed, giving us the time to address issues.”

Carlos Carrillo, Director of Learning Management Systems and Services, Pima Community College

CONCLUSION

Through innovative solutions like employing OER material to overcome economic barriers and the ability to provide a consistent online experience through Brightspace, Pima is making great progress on its mission to extend the reach of its campus and reach more learners. We’re proud to be a part of the work that Pima is doing to provide accessible and affordable education options to its community. We look forward to helping them realize their goals of expanding their plan for the next iteration of reorganization in the coming years.

It’s also worth noting that Pima is instrumental in providing insight into the work that they’re doing to other colleges as acting host for the Instructional Technology Council’s eLearning Conference. Like Pima, D2L also advocates for connection events such as this to share resources and best practices with other institutions and congratulate Pima on its efforts to enhance the industry as a whole.