

CASE STUDY

Wharton Interactive Teams with BlueJeans to Connect Learners Around the World

Wharton Interactive is an embodiment of The Wharton School's motto "Knowledge for Action" in its cutting-edge approaches to education.

Wharton is the oldest business school in the world and remains one of the most prestigious because of its research and classroom pedagogy. Wharton Interactive has taken that classroom teaching method and thought about how to deliver adaptive and immersive learning at scale with its Alternate Reality Courses (ARCs). Creating an ARC takes a cross-functional team of leading game developers, interactive fiction writers, and pedagogy experts. Their innovative platforms, simulations, and games present challenging scenarios where students can learn by practice, turning theoretical classroom topics into alternate realities.

For instance, in BlueSky Ventures, a game that builds an evidence-based entrepreneurial mindset, students analyze business models, create financial projections, and see how those models fare.

"It's a truly different approach to education," says Sarah Toms, Executive Director and Co-Founder of Wharton Interactive. "It's taking gaming, an activity people are familiar with that has a narrative, and giving the learner a starring role in that narrative. They're not just watching a video, students actively participate in their learning process."

As part of the gaming journey, students receive video instruction from Wharton faculty and other experts. They also get personalized feedback, scores, progress updates, and opportunities to increase their knowledge and improve their skills.



Industry: Higher education

Challenge: To support team collaboration outside games-based learning, Wharton Interactive needed a video conferencing platform that was easy to use and could scale up to thousands of students simultaneously.

Solution: Wharton Interactive deployed BlueJeans Meetings to have unlimited team meetings per administrative account.

Results: BlueJeans Meeting's interface has allowed learners around the world to connect at the same time, making the lessons more realistic.

Wharton Interactive has seen a student completion rate of nearly 100%, compared to the 12% to 15% of students who complete the average online course.

A full 98% of ARC learners say they've learned something they couldn't have learned in a traditional class.

Realistic learning simulations have generated interest from prospective students and professors.

“We saw that the scalability of BlueJeans set it apart from the competition. Being able to handle many synchronous sessions within one administrative account made bringing our projects forward easier for us and the students.”

– LENA ELGUINDI, DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS, WHARTON INTERACTIVE

An important part of a business education is learning to work as a team, which students will need to do after they graduate and join a company. To simulate this, there are ARC courses with teams of students taking different roles in virtual companies, where they're challenged to solve problems and meet sales quotas.

As Wharton Interactive developed its team simulations, it identified a communications issue. Besides the students based near the school in Philadelphia, there were thousands enrolled in online programs who lived around the world in more than 90 countries. How could those remote students communicate effectively with other team members to play the game?

Email was too slow and chat functionality would work for some situations but may not create the realism they needed for the simulation. The best solution was seen as video conferencing. However, with so many solution providers available, the Wharton Interactive team knew they had to spend some time researching the right one for their groundbreaking program.

Finding an Answer That Can Scale

Wharton Interactive's long-form ARCs have six 90-minute team sessions that are held live, during which team members in multiple time zones interact and work out their assigned problems. The ability to connect at the same time is crucial to the program, since the individual teams need to make decisions very quickly to simulate decision making in the real world, where department heads can be spread across the globe.

When Wharton Interactive evaluated various video conferencing providers, one thing became clear: It was imperative to find one that allowed unlimited team meetings per administrative account since thousands of students were going to be involved. BlueJeans was the only provider that could do that.

“We saw that the scalability of BlueJeans set it apart from the competition,” says Lena Elguindi, Director of Strategic Partnerships for Wharton Interactive. “Being able to handle many synchronous sessions within one administrative account made bringing our projects forward easier for us and the students.”

“It’s awesome to see a faculty member who sees an ARC course and then incorporates it into their curriculum. Then they talk to their faculty friends about it and it has a referral network effect that’s been a real positive outcome for us.”

– SARAH TOMS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CO-FOUNDER, WHARTON INTERACTIVE

When students sign up, they’re assigned to a team and the games administrator creates a BlueJeans meeting for that team. Meeting invites are issued with the session time and a link to join. Any questions during a meeting can be addressed by having a support team member pop into the meeting.

Educating Through Realistic Simulations

Wharton Interactive has invested heavily in creating an immersive game experience that’s complemented by the BlueJeans platform. In the world of online education, just 12% to 15% of students will typically complete a course. Wharton Interactive, however, has seen a student completion rate of nearly 100%, which is a phenomenal achievement.

ARC learners report that they enjoy the simulations’ simple and intuitive user interface, and that the ability to connect with their teammates during live team

sessions increases their engagement, satisfaction, and comprehension of the course’s learning goals. A full 98% of students say they’ve learned something they couldn’t have learned in a traditional class.

“It’s awesome to see a faculty member who sees an ARC course and then incorporates it into their curriculum,” says Toms. “Then they talk to their faculty friends about it and it has a referral network effect that’s been a real positive outcome for us.”

Looking Beyond to a New Frontier of Learning

Wharton Interactive has big plans for expanding its ARCs, with BlueJeans Meetings playing an integral role. The team is working to increase its number of learners around the globe after seeing interest from students in areas such as Southeast Asia, India, Latin America, and Saharan Africa. They hope to soon integrate BlueJeans Meetings directly into the ARC platform to make using video conferencing even easier for learners.

In addition, Wharton Interactive plans to connect ARC alumni through video and chat using the channels function of the messaging platform Discord, and to use BlueJeans Events to host special speakers for the school. Likewise, the team plans to expand its use of BlueJeans' virtual collaboration whiteboard feature as well as breakout rooms to move participants into smaller meetings.

Interest in ARC courses is expanding beyond the business school. Wharton Interactive is now working with Penn's engineering, education, law, and medical schools to develop ARC courses for their programs.

"This works anywhere you're educating people who are going to be part of high-performing teams that need to work together," says Toms. "It's about developing leadership, which is the backbone of any profession."

ABOUT WHARTON INTERACTIVE

Based within the University of Pennsylvania, Wharton Interactive's innovative platforms, simulations, and games empower educators to tailor highly engaging, deeply immersive learning experiences, which makes the difference between merely covering content and learning how to effectively apply it. Its simulations create active-learning opportunities.

Participating learners have an experience that challenges them, helping to instill meaningful theoretical concepts. By confronting challenges actively and in real time, students gain a deeper understanding of the field and, importantly, they remember what they have learned. Wharton Interactive is dedicated to democratizing the future of education, so students can actively participate in their own learning and "own what they know."