

CASE STUDY

University of Michigan Scales Virtual Exchange Learning with BlueJeans

Harnessing innovation to expand access to learners on campus and worldwide, the University of Michigan has deepened their commitment to providing virtual exchange experiences at scale. With this in mind, Todd Austin, Videoconferencing Lead, searched for new ways of delivering easier, scalable, and cost-effective live video communications to multiple locations simultaneously. Responsible for addressing the technical needs of the project, Austin explored modern solutions for connecting multiple parties while supporting a variety of conference room and classroom equipment located across campus, including Polycom, Lifesize, and Cisco hardware, along with PC-based, mobile video endpoints.

Transitioning to the Future of Video Conferencing

Though traditional, point to point video conferencing was common throughout campus, according to Austin, “it was really limiting what we could do.” These endpoints required expensive hardware upgrades along with the skills necessary to install and maintain them. “It wasn’t where the future was,” he explains.

After researching live video software solutions, BlueJeans proved to be the best for what was needed. BlueJeans’ interoperability was a key factor when it came to maximizing seldom used video hardware. “For instance, there was \$40,000 worth of hardware just sitting in a classroom and it was used maybe twice a year,” notes Austin.

Originally spearheaded by Austin in 2012, the introduction of BlueJeans was very well received. Though many departments had built-in video conferencing systems, The College of Literature, Sciences, and the



Industry: Education

Challenges: Optimize underutilized legacy video hardware.

Easily enable virtual exchange classes worldwide.

Provide superior convenience and ease of use for remote speakers.

Solutions: BlueJeans Meetings removes barriers between video conferencing systems, platforms, and devices.

BlueJeans Events livestreaming supports reliable, multi-party communication with ease and simplicity.

Results: In just two years, BlueJeans went campus wide.

Each hour, 30,000 minutes are used on campus.

Saved thousands of dollars by not buying new video hardware.

“After experimenting with different solutions, BlueJeans was by far superior to other tools. The platform’s ability to adapt to changing network conditions makes all the difference.”

– TODD AUSTIN, VIDEOCONFERENCING LEAD, COLLEGE OF LITERATURE, SCIENCE, AND THE ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Arts was the first to routinely use the service, but others soon followed. With both need and fit falling into place, BlueJeans quickly caught on with various colleges, departments, users, and faculty. In just two years, BlueJeans went campus wide, a rare feat in academia. The service also extends to Ann Arbor’s sister campuses in Dearborn and Flint. “Now, we use 30,000 minutes every hour or so on campus,” Austin says.

Facilitating Reliable Virtual Exchange Classes

For Austin, connecting international partner schools to support virtual exchange classrooms worldwide is a priority. A dynamic learning opportunity for students in multiple locations, these classes offer broader perspectives and diverse insight into the subject matter. In addition to other countries, Austin and team have connected partners in Libya, Cuba and Tehran. “BlueJeans has repeatedly proven to be a terrific tool for these classes. Even from obscure locations, BlueJeans never lets us down,” offers Austin.

Sometimes, these classrooms are located in parts of the world with limited technology and resources, like their nursing school partner in Haiti, who originally connected through a less than reliable, 3G cellular link. After installing fiber link, the signal from Haiti became much more reliable, even though bandwidth remained very limited. Without BlueJeans, ensuring a consistent, reliable connection would not have been possible. “After experimenting with different solutions, BlueJeans was by far superior to other tools. The platform’s ability to adapt to changing network conditions made all the difference,” Austin adds. University meetings also take place using the audio-only aspect of BlueJeans, replacing aging campus teleconferencing infrastructure.

Livestreaming for Multiple Classroom Scenarios

Part of facilitating better communication involves creating custom livestreams for hosting multi-party speakers. This is where the BlueJeans Events comprehensive moderator controls come in handy. Events support livestreaming

scenarios such as hosting distant committee members in student dissertations, while also providing a passive stream to remote audiences, and letting presenters participate at remote conferences. BlueJeans' adaptability makes each scenario seamless and even supports multiple meetings sequentially while keeping other participants "on hold" so they're not privy to more private discussions. Sometimes, livestreaming supports 5–6 institutional locations worldwide along with dozens of students joining from home and internet cafés.

More than a video meetings service, BlueJeans is a partner helping to evolve the institution's communications infrastructure. "Everybody's well bought into the value of BlueJeans," says Austin. The ongoing support BlueJeans offers allows Austin to adapt to any meetings scenario, simplifying the user experience. He also uses Command Center, BlueJeans analytics dashboard, for monitoring live data streams. "When I'm using BlueJeans, I have confidence that it will work," he concludes.

ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Founded in 1817, the University of Michigan is located in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and is the oldest university in the state. Its mission is to serve the people of Michigan, and the world, through preeminence in creating, communicating, preserving and applying knowledge, art, and academic values, and in developing leaders and citizens who will challenge the present and enrich the future. Their greatest value as a university is positively impacting the society they serve. In Fall 2016, the university had an enrollment of 28,983 undergraduate and 12,565 graduate students in 600 academic programs. As of October 2018, 50 MacArthur Fellows and 25 Nobel Prize winners have been affiliated with University of Michigan. For more information on University of Michigan's Virtual Exchange go to <http://virtualexchange.umich.edu>.