

Innovation and Leadership: An AI-Powered Transformation at the Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicadas



UPC
Universidad Peruana
de Ciencias Aplicadas



A Campus Conversation with Silvana Balarezo

Digital Learning Experience Manager,
Universidad Peruana de Ciencias
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Since its foundation in 1994, the Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicadas (UPC) has maintained a resolute focus on creativity and innovation. Its mission is to “develop well-rounded, global-minded, and innovative leaders to drive a transformation of Peru”, and today UPC offers 56 undergraduate and 30 post-graduate programs to support more than 70,000 students.

UPC’s focus on innovation manifests in a commitment to be a leader in artificial intelligence (AI). Silvana Balarezo, Head of Digital Learning Experiences, spoke with Anthology and told us how AI is helping to improve the learning experience for students.

TYPE OF INSTITUTION:

PRIVATE

LOCATION:

LIMA, PERU

STUDENTS:

70,000+

ANTHOLOGY PRODUCT:

Blackboard



How has your institution included AI in your courses?

At UPC, we are leading the integration of AI in education via our learning management system (LMS): Blackboard. This is part of a larger initiative to take advantage of emerging technologies, with the aim of improving pedagogical quality and strengthening learning outcomes for our students.

Describe your process to adopt AI tools in Blackboard.

Since the beginning of 2023, UPC has been a pioneer in the exploration and adoption of the AI tools available in Blackboard, powered by Microsoft. These tools have been integrated directly into the LMS, allowing us to extend richer and effective educational experiences without the need to add additional external platforms.

Are there features that have been particularly popular at UPC?

One of the first applications that we've implemented at UPC is the AI Design Assistant to help design virtual courses. Using the course syllabus as its basis, Blackboard suggests an optimal course structure, which has made it far easier for instructors to transition to the latest Blackboard instance, Ultra. The AI Design Assistant has been crucial through the migration process and has allowed instructors to re-think and improve their courses.

Further, the functionality to generate assessments—inspired by existing question banks—has simplified the creation of aligned and coherent tests enormously, allowing instructors to focus more on the teaching process and less on administrative tasks. This has resulted in a notable improvement in the quality of pedagogical activities and uplift in student participation and satisfaction.

Another notable innovation is the AI Conversation, which develops critical thinking skills for learners. Using this tool, instructors can create Socratic conversations that invite students to reflect deeply on learning concepts, improving their understanding and retention of key subjects.

Beyond technology, what else is UPC doing to be an AI leader?

UPC was the first location for the Anthology's global event tour, [Ethical AI in Action](#), which took place at our Monterrico campus October 3, 2024. This brought together representatives from a diverse range of institutions to learn about best practices for ethical AI use and to discuss responsible implementation in the classroom. This event reaffirmed our position as a market leader in the adoption of emerging technologies and our commitment to innovation in education.

What have you learned to this point? And where would UPC like to focus in the future?

This year, we've faced a significant challenge that has led to a review of our use of both Blackboard and AI tools. This involved designing a course leveraging all the AI capabilities of the LMS, thinking about learning analytics so we can guide learners toward success. We've captured the necessary data so that we can respond adequately to student needs, with support from Blackboard and other powerful tools like Perusall.

At UPC, we're at the forefront of digital transformation in education, using artificial intelligence to enrich teaching and learning. Our focus isn't just to make education more efficient, but also to prepare our students for a future where applying digital technology will be crucial.





Epilogue

Anthology thanks Silvana Balarezo and all her team at UPC for their partnership spanning many years and for their dedication to innovate using Blackboard's AI capabilities. Their leadership in the area of digital transformation has been inspiring over a long period of time, as recognized in previous editions of the Catalyst Awards.



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