Blackboard®

A World Class
Student Centric University
The University of Groningen

Quick Facts

University Profile

› 30,041 students (1 Sept 2014)
› 6,254 enroled for the first time (1 Sept 2014)
› 5,238 FTE staff
› 479 FTE professors (m/f: 385/94)
› 1,500 PhD students
› 45 Bachelor's programmes
› 146 Master's programmes
› 14 Research Masters
› 10 Faculties
› 9 Graduate Schools
› 110,000 alumni
› Annual turnover: 614 million

Blackboard Solutions

› Blackboard Learn™
› Blackboard Mobile Learn and MOSAIC™
› Blackboard Collaborate™

rijksuniversiteit groningen

The University of Groningen has a rich academic tradition dating back to 1614, providing high quality research and teaching, and achieving consistently high rankings in international university league tables. Behind the façade of its majestic, centuries old buildings, resides a very 21st century virtual learning environment. Since the university first launched Blackboard Learn in 1999, the daily number of users has grown from under 1,000 to over 61,000 users per day - and shows no signs of slowing down.

The Vision

The University of Groningen knows only too well that learning isn't just about the teaching and research, and the courses that are offered. Success depends on being agile to stay competitive, relevant and to have robust IT systems and processes in place to support the University's educational vision. To strengthen its international position and achieve growth, the University needed to become more innovative, robust and resilient in its use of technology for improving teaching and learning. Key focuses have been to:

• Enhance the overall online student experience to support international growth

• Personalise the students' experiences of learning and teaching

• Develop efficient and effective assessment and feedback strategies

• Create institutional and academic efficiencies by getting systems to integrate with each other

The Solution: Moving to a managed hosting solution to improve resilience and free up internal resource from managing commodity services

Blackboard Learn (Nestor) is the University's digital learning environment for both lecturers and students and plays a crucial role in teaching. In 2010, to support students and accommodate the growth in enrolments and users, Groningen made a strategic decision to move to Blackboard Managed Hosting. The move not only freed up valuable resources, but led to a better, more stable, 24/7 experience for its faculty and students. The University has been able to offload the operational risks of managing the virtual learning environment whilst giving them the autonomy and full control to extend, open up and expand what's possible with Blackboard Learn to create a more personalised learning environment. Louwarnoud Van Der Duim, Head of Educational Support and Innovation, Centre for Information Technology, at the University of Groningen explains that, "the move has enabled my institution to focus on the core mission of education – not on managing technology."

The Results: A modern, student-oriented approach aligned with the institutional missions of teaching and research

Through re-focusing its efforts, the University is now able to drive innovation in the field of technology enhanced learning to meet the demands of today's learner. It has employed students to help deliver IT support and engages with its students to assist (or in some cases, lead) development of applications and services.

Providing students with one place to manage their education experience

Today, the University supports its students through the delivery of a personalised and mobile learning environment which serves as their student portal and provides easily accessible educational information and resources. The functionality of the Blackboard Learn Community Engagement module enables individual faculties to own a tab within the learning environment to display relevant information, news, and announcements for their students. In this same learning environment, students can select personalised 'widgets' to add to their My Nestor tab so they can decide what information they want to access, including My Grades, My Current Library Loans, My Schedule, Available Workplaces, Balance for student cards and many other individualised and customisable features to create an engaging 'one stop' environment to meet all their needs.

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Running digital examinations

Since the move to a managed hosting solution, the University set out an approach to deliver online testing including the submission of essay based exams up to 15 hours a day, 6 days per week. The main aim in going digital was to improve the quality of testing. Today, students can write essay examinations using a PC, enabling them to rearrange text fragments more easily rather than using paper-based strike-throughs and arrows. This has increased the quality of examinations for many students. In the 1st year 200 teachers marked 150 student examinations saving 6600 academic marking hours.

Students as collaborators

A key focus is to enable student partnership, collaboration, decision-making and involvement at the corporate, faculty and programme level. This approach places students in charge of their own learning experience and prepares them for the world of work. One of the many examples of this student centric approach, which has helped achieve operational excellence, is by utilising students for the support of 'Nestor' and digital examinations. With user logins growing to 60,000 in 2014, students are now a critical part of the strategy to help academics and students in the adoption, and use of Nestor across the University. To drive the use of this technology university-wide, every faculty has its own Nestor Co-ordinator.

Early warning system for academics and students

The University has made significant improvements in reducing drop-out rates and improving success rates at the Bachelor's level. Using data from the SIS and Blackboard, the University has developed an early warning system for academics to highlight student performance. This information is used by academics and student support services to provide additional help and support. Another example of the usefulness of this integration, is that students have a visual dashboard that acts as an early warning system to provide a graphical representation of their progress.

With its vision centered on the 'student' and its ability to drive innovations in technology enhanced learning, the University of Groningen continues to be among the global elite, solidifying its position internationally as an academic innovator.

"Successful online assessment requires military precision. It's been so successful that the board is pushing IT to build the capacity to do more."

**Louwarnoud Van Der Duim
Head of Educational Support and Innovation, Centre for Information Technology,
University of Groningen**

For more information email **askus@blackboard.com** or visit **blackboard.com**.

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