Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (ITESM)

- Blackboard Learning System™ client since March 2001
- Private, University
- Founded: 1943
- +95,000 students
- 7,600 academic staff
- +4,000 courses powered by Blackboard
- Server Platform: Solaris™ 7
- Student Information System: SCT Banner™

http://www.itesm.mx

Blackboard and Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (ITESM)

The Situation

With 33 campuses located in 22 states throughout Mexico, 9 regional sites across Latin America, North and Central South America, and Europe, the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (ITESM) is one of the world’s most prestigious private university systems. In 1995, ITESM developed a new education model designed to carry out their mission of educating individuals committed to the social, economic and political improvement of their communities. Mexico was in a state of change and for the first time, the university needed to address societal demands for a workforce that could efficiently respond to a new technological and globalised world, as well as the growing development of telecommunications and information technology in Mexico.

Guided by these requirements, a new 10 year plan was introduced that would enable ITESM to elevate their education programmes to a new level. The plan outlined the following six strategies:

- Reengineer the existing traditional teaching and learning processes
- Focus on research and continuing education
- Develop a “Virtual University”
- Internationalise the Institute
- Maintain a continuous improvement process
- Promote the growth of the Institute

The core objective of the plan ensures that each student acquires knowledge and simultaneously develops certain skills, attitudes, and values in a directed and programmed manner. Prior to 1995, faculty had designed their courses in a more traditional manner—setting objectives, giving lectures, and evaluating student progress through examinations. The new model centers the learning activities on the student, requiring self-directed student learning, and emphasising the acquisition of “real world” knowledge. Students are required to take on a larger role in all activities, work in teams, collaborate with their peers, and become actively involved in the course testing and evaluation process.
The Solution

Central to the development of the new model was the efficient use of information technology and the Internet in every course taught at ITESM. Director of Technology for Education, Eduardo Salcedo states “by investing in an easy-to-use, scalable technology platform, faculty would be able to better plan and manage their course information, give students increased access to information, and introduce the possibility of asynchronous and remote activities.” To that end, in 1997 ITESM selected Lotus Learning Space to deliver its online courses. Over the next four years, ITESM worked to build out its technology infrastructure and online learning programmes. Network nodes were set up all over campus, specialised computer labs were built, and each student was required to have a laptop computer and Internet service. ITESM found that while Lotus Learning Space provided the ability to collaborate online, it lacked in other critical areas such as ease-of-use, intuitive navigation, and robust tracking capabilities.

In September of 2000, ITESM began to evaluate alternative e-Education platforms and after a careful selection process, two candidates remained—WebCT and Blackboard. ITESM would be faced with the looming challenge of not only replacing its current system, Lotus Learning Space, but also selecting a platform that could help maintain interest in the institution’s existing Internet-based teaching and learning initiatives. To properly evaluate both systems, a committee of ten administrators, faculty and students were selected and a six month pilot programme was launched on four separate campuses. “We found that faculty were up and running much faster on Blackboard. We also spoke with many other satisfied Blackboard clients and found that the Blackboard solution could support multiple pedagogies, specifically ITESM’s unique project based, problem based, case study, and collaborative learning methodologies,” states Salcedo. In March of 2001, after extensive evaluation, the ITESM board of directors selected the Blackboard Learning System™, powered by Solaris and SUN Enterprise™ 10000, as its e-Education environment.

Soon thereafter, ITESM began to build faculty training programmes in an effort to capitalise on the momentum of the successful pilot. By the end of 2001, more than 200 courses had been created. To motivate faculty adoption even further, ITESM created a course certification process which consisted of selecting university representatives to evaluate each online course created. Prizes were awarded to faculty based on creativity, breadth and depth of content development, and overall course design. To gather continual faculty and student feedback about
Monterrey Tech Graduate School of Business Administration and Leadership (EGADE-ITESM)

As the graduate school of business at Tec de Monterrey (ITESM), EGADE has earned a reputation as one of the leading Latin American business schools in the world. Ranked No. 1 in Latin America by America Economia magazine (a Dow Jones publication) for four consecutive years, EGADE is particularly distinguished for making extensive use of technology, offering face-to-face, satellite, and online programmes, which include the MBA, degrees in finance, marketing, manufacturing leadership, international management, and e-management, as well as executive education programmes. With internationally renowned faculty and leading-edge learning processes and technology, the school attracts business executives and government decision makers from regional, national and international contexts.

Approximately six months ago, EGADE began to explore how they could utilise the Blackboard platform to power online courses for a new collaborative partnership called OneMBA – a global executive MBA programme delivered by five top-ranked business schools in Asia, Europe, and North and South America. The 21-month curriculum is designed for achievement-oriented executives living and working in each of the participating schools’ regions. Executives study two-thirds of the programme at their home business school and spend the remaining one-third traveling to different modules across the globe, interacting both in-person and virtually with other teams, executives, and faculty.

As the head of the international committee of technology for the OneMBA programme, EGADE proposed the use of Blackboard as the exclusive e-Education platform for this ground-breaking initiative. “We wanted to have an online environment where the students, professors and faculty at the participating schools could get ‘connected’ and work together. A significant portion of the programme is delivered purely online, so it was critical that we select a distance learning technology that enables participating executives to easily involve themselves in global virtual teamwork, as well as complete assignments between course sessions and modules from almost anywhere in the world,” states Luz H. Godina, Head of Technology for EGADE.

In June of 2002, EGADE licensed the Blackboard Learning System – Basic Edition, powered by Windows 2000 Server platform. “From the installation of the software and the service we have received to date, we have had a very pleasant experience. The technology coordinators are extremely excited about all the possibilities we see. More importantly, we look forward in the coming months to work with the Blackboard platform, particularly helping the OneMBA professors in the design of their online learning experiences. The journey is just beginning,” states Godina.

Blackboard, ITESM implemented satisfaction surveys, which served as an important tool in understanding how key university constituents perceived the value of online learning, as well as the usability of Blackboard. “Faculty and students have responded enthusiastically to Blackboard. Advanced staff can apply more sophisticated skill and the software it is also very inviting for those with less experience,” states Salceno.

ITESM forecasts that by the end of 2003, 10,000–12,000 courses will be hosted on Blackboard. With user statistics such as these, ITESM is clearly achieving its goal of utilising e-Education technology to improve and advance the teaching and learning process today and far into the new millennium.

Customising Blackboard To Meet Campus Needs

With the selection of the Blackboard Learning System, ITESM benefits from the Blackboard Building Blocks™ Architecture, which serves as the institution’s gateway to unlimited options and individually tailored solutions. System extensions provide third party connections to a wide variety of tools, including synchronous and asynchronous communication tools, virtual simulations, complex assessment engines, content repositories and many more. “We were impressed with Blackboard’s ability to provide ITESM with a solution that enables the university to take advantage of its existing software and technology investments,” states Salceno. Moving forward, ITESM plans to extend its use of the Blackboard platform through the integration of applications such as Centra Symposium software, Questionmark Perception assessment engine, WebEQ’s equation editor, and ArcStream’s Blackboard To Go.

ITESM And The Future

With a successful installation securely in place, ITESM will also look to Blackboard to help address the growing demand for continuous education in remote parts of Latin America. The university system currently supports satellite-based distance learning programmes to more than 280 Community Learning Centers (CLC’s) located in isolated areas of Mexico, with plans to establish an additional 200 centers. Long a leader in distance education via satellite television, ITESM is now moving aggressively into Internet-based instruction and is looking to bring its
course offerings online to reach even the smallest rural community.

Distance learning programmes are evolving from satellite–based, in-class delivery models to exclusively online programmes, as well as a hybrid of the two. “Right now, ITESM has more than 1,200 students who are studying exclusively online, and around 12,000 who use hybrid programmes. Within 5 years, most of our courses will be offered entirely on the Internet through Blackboard,” states ITESM Virtual University President Patricio Lopez del Puerto.

In order to successfully expand its online course offerings into new markets such as CLC’s, ITESM’s e-Education platform must also be able to display the user-interface in multiple-languages, enabling faculty to create tailored, in-language online learning programmes. In July of 2002, ITESM participated in the beta programme for Blackboard Learning System ML™, the multi-language edition of the Blackboard course management system. “We decided to participate in the Blackboard Learning System ML beta programme because we wanted to be one of the first universities to test and evaluate the Spanish version of the product. We look forward to the opportunities Blackboard presents through their continuous introduction of cutting-edge technologies such as the multi-lingual version of their platform,” states Salcedo.

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