

Rural College in Georgia Creates Blended Learning Network



Central Georgia Technical College uses Cisco® video conferencing to increase enrollment and offer blended learning.

Executive Summary

Central Georgia Technical College

- **Industry:** Higher Education
- **Location:** Macon, Georgia
- **Number of Students:** More than 12,165 credit students

CHALLENGE

- Need for more flexible class scheduling to meet students' needs
- Desire to reduce class cancellations due to low student enrollment
- Need for broader range of class offerings to rural campus sites

SOLUTION

- Provided a platform for blended-learning classes
- Provided programs to remote locations using video-conferencing technology
- Combined low-enrollment classes from urban and rural sites

RESULTS

- Provided 160 simultaneous teleconferencing sessions
- Increased student enrollment in distance-learning courses by 45 percent
- Achieved financial savings using technology to replace teacher salaries

Challenge

Located in Macon, Central Georgia Technical College (CGTC) campuses span 12 counties, which together are approximately the size of Delaware. CGTC offers 39 associate degrees, 50 diplomas and 124 technical certificates of credit in areas of aerospace, trade and industry, business and computer technologies, health sciences, public safety, professional services, and general studies.

Over the past few years, CGTC has experienced lower-than-average student retention rates. In the past, CGTC offered three ways for students to take courses: face-to-face (traditional) instruction, online instruction, and a hybrid model of classroom and online learning. These course offerings were mutually exclusive. Students were required to select one option. As a result, when student schedules changed due to personal or professional circumstances, students were forced to drop classes.

In addition, this rigid teaching model limited students' opportunities. The volume of professional and adult students, work schedules, personal responsibilities, and lifestyle changes affected CGTC students' abilities to stay in class. To allow for flexible learning and to eliminate mutually exclusive course delivery, CGTC decided to develop a new educational model called BlendFlex learning, which incorporates a new, integrated course delivery approach.

Solution

CGTC's BlendFlex learning program was formulated to break down silos by allowing students to pair the right learning method with their academic needs. The vision for BlendFlex learning is to allow students to attend classes in various ways.

To enact BlendFlex CGTC had to find a solutions provider that could offer advanced conferencing technologies, which would grant students access to the college's learning management system (LMS), recorded faculty lectures, and remote access from home or work.

In 2014, the CGTC technology team began to build on its existing technology infrastructure. "By refreshing the way our students access courses, we wanted to make sure blended learning was seamless and that our technology was innovative," says Gardner Long, the chief technology officer at CGTC. "We wanted students to access blended-learning courses that included all of the school's learning modalities."

As a long-time Cisco customer, CGTC turned to the Cisco account team to evaluate products and services for BlendFlex. Long and his team explored innovative Cisco collaboration options and decided to deploy Cisco TelePresence®, Jabber® and WebEx® solutions. Together, these collaboration solutions provide a virtually

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integrated and comprehensive environment for educational interaction.

To build its BlendFlex vision, CGTC implemented 81 Cisco TelePresence units throughout its service area over 6 years to accommodate up to 150 simultaneous sessions. This deployment promised to connect the classrooms at the college’s remote Georgia campuses in Warner Robins, Milledgeville, Eatonton, Forsyth, Crawford, Peach, and Hawkinsville.

“With the new, converged blended-learning environment, our students can attend courses synchronously in person, via high-definition TelePresence technology or using Cisco Jabber from home or work,” says Long. Following deployment, CGTC was ready to begin enrollment with the BlendFlex system to connect distance-learning classrooms, expand educational programs, attract a broader range of students, and eliminate any differences between online and in-person classes.

Results

“Offering a blended-learning model has been extremely popular with our students and instructors,” says Long. As a result of its new technology deployment, CGTC is now using BlendFlex to facilitate instructional delivery easily and interchangeably.

First and foremost, students at the college—whether remote or on campus—can access teacher-prepared content, case study discussions, and live interviews through any synchronous video solution available from work or home, whether it’s a Cisco TelePresence, Jabber or WebEx solution.

As a second option, students can take a class asynchronously online by using CGTC’s LMS, which stores the links to faculty-recorded class lectures and other course content. These video recordings can be accessed from all platforms including Windows, Apple iOS, and Android on computers, tablets, and phone devices.

“What really makes BlendFlex unique is the third option we offer, that gives students the flexibility to change their mode of class participation,” says Long. “Whether it’s synchronously or asynchronously, weekly or by topic, students can keep up with their courses according to their needs or preferences.”

CGTC is currently enacting a “learner-in-control” approach, which begins with the student being able to move from one learning option to another based on preference. This strategy frees the student from mandatory attendance in the classroom while still promoting the importance of course content, lectures, and student questions.

One of the challenges at CGTC’s remote campuses was meeting the minimum number of 12 students to justify a class. For the 2014 fall semester, there were 816 students enrolled in 52 unique classes consisting of 161 sections using Cisco collaboration equipment. Without BlendFlex, 449 students would not have been able

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Product List

VIDEO

- Cisco Jabber
- Cisco TelePresence
- Cisco WebEx

to attend courses they were interested in due to not meeting the minimum enrollment number at the remote sites.

CGTC’s accounting, management, marketing, health, and criminal justice departments have experienced immediate success and student enrollment increases, too. CGTC no longer needs to send instructors to remote campuses to administer specific courses, and because students don’t have to travel for these courses, CGTC’s new IT capabilities provide a cost-effective process for teaching and learning.

Next Steps

In 2015, a pilot project was created to offer tutoring to CGTC remote sites using the Cisco TelePresence solution. To realize this project, CGTC is developing a self-contained collaboration table that will allow up to six students to collaborate with a tutor or faculty member. These students will be able to collaborate one-on-one or one-to-many in a tutoring exchange across campus locations.

With a goal of serving 10,000 students all over the world, and putting people back to work, CGTC is also providing education to those who have served in our armed forces. The college is currently developing a remote campus close to Robins Air Force Base in Warner Robins, Georgia, to engage returning service members and their families. In addition to providing workforce education and training for veterans, CGTC is hoping to deliver online courses to active service members who are located in other countries.

Because Cisco TelePresence technology and online learning are becoming widely adopted in higher education, CGTC is assisting K-through-12 school districts with this next phase of teaching and learning. CGTC has rewired local schools for no cost to ensure that young students are not left behind during the continued advancement of IT in learning.

For More Information

To find out more about Cisco TelePresence, visit: <http://www.cisco.com/go/telepresence>

To find out more about Cisco Jabber, visit: <http://www.cisco.com/go/jabber>

To find out more about Cisco WebEx, visit: <http://www.cisco.com/webex>

To find out more about Cisco Show and Share, visit <http://www.cisco.com/showandshare>