



Southern State Community College
Hillsboro, OH
www.sccc.edu

Wimba Saves Gas, Time, and Travel While Expanding World View at Rural Southern State Community College

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-Louis Mays, Librarian and Faculty Member, Southern State Community College

"We live in an underprivileged area of Appalachia Ohio." That simple statement offered by Louis Mays, a librarian and professor at Southern State Community College, says a mouthful about why such an institution relies on the Wimba Collaboration Suite to save gas, money, and time traveling, while better teaching and reaching its remote students.

Located in rural Appalachia Ohio, Southern State Community College (SSCC) consists of four campuses that span five counties which cover a service area approximately the size of Rhode Island. Approximately 30% of its citizens live below the federal poverty level, so needless to say, its programs truly exemplify the spirit of community colleges, as SSCC not only offers an affordable traditional curriculum but also numerous classes that train students to succeed in the local economy, comprised primarily of small businesses and a few service organizations.

By incorporating collaborative, active learning methods into physical and virtual classrooms, faculty at SSCC who teach courses as diverse as

information literacy, anatomy and physiology, biology, math, human services, and nursing, have increased student engagement and class interaction by using Wimba Classroom and Wimba Pronto. These elements of collaboration include voice, social presence, chat, share (sharing applications with students and peers), video, and course content.

"It's not uncommon for a faculty member and students at our institution to travel to two or even three campuses a day," says Mays, who's been the librarian at SSCC for more than 30 years. With the recent economic troubles, his colleagues and students at SSCC need to save any way they can.

"We look at Wimba as a way to get us off the highways," Mays says. "We use Wimba Classroom to teach classes live online, and as a supplemental Powerlink in Blackboard, our course management system. We also use Wimba Classroom for conducting meetings and workshops. In the past, our faculty and staff had to travel quite a bit, but now we've

WIMBA PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

- Wimba Classroom
- Wimba Pronto

KEY BENEFITS

- Saves gas and time for commuting faculty and students
- Broadens world view of isolated, rural students

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WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

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For example, Mays uses Wimba Classroom to teach both blended and entirely online courses. He says that approximately 20 miles separate each of SSCC's four rural campuses. Everyone does a "tremendous amount of traveling. We have faculty and staff living from Columbus to Maysville, Kentucky, and from Portsmouth to Cincinnati and the Dayton area. Wimba Classroom is helping alleviate some of this travel because it can be used on a daily basis for a variety of diverse activities beyond teaching and learning."

From a non-instructional perspective, SSCC now holds an ever increasing number of meetings live online. These meetings run the gamut of typical institution and system-wide sessions. From Faculty Senate meetings to regular online collaborations of the Clinton County Adolescent Literary Group, SSCC has seen tremendous value from Wimba Classroom in numerous facets of its institution. Even – and perhaps most naturally – SSCC's Distance Learning Subcommittee meets live online with Wimba Classroom. The college also collaborates with local high schools to meet with college-bound students on a regular basis, helping them prepare for college by giving them information, access, and resources from academic libraries, financial aid, career counseling, and other aspects of transitioning to college. This initiative has caught the interest of several state leaders in Columbus that feel this is a pilot program of 'things to come' in collaboration between K-12 and higher education.

This is a vital mission of the new University System of Ohio's master plan for higher education in Ohio.

And from an IT perspective, SSCC teaches its faculty how to use its course management system, Blackboard, by having them remotely login via Wimba.

Faculty and staff often invite guest speakers to connect using Wimba. "We live in an isolated area many miles from any commercial airport and we don't have the funds for outside speakers and expenses associated with bringing them to our area", says Mays. "With Wimba, we can invite anyone willing to give us an hour or two from their office or home desktop PC. We save money and provide more access to our students that crave contact and word from other parts of the nation and world."

The college is now orienting everyone to Wimba Pronto for spontaneous, informal communication about coursework and social networking. Mays and other faculty regularly communicate with their students at all times of day to offer quick advice or to answer a student's question in an instant.

Mays teaches Information Literacy in the Digital Age, a library science course that introduces students to digital and library resources.

He teaches them how to evaluate these resources. It's a low enrollment course that once was taught face-to-face at one campus each quarter, and because of its traditionally low enrollment, at the start of each new quarter the SSCC staff hoped that they'd get enough students to attend that class. But now SSCC offers this course via Wimba because students can be from anywhere – and they haven't worried about meeting enrollment minimums since. "We don't have to retrieve all our students from one location," Mays says with a blissful sense of relief.



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ABOUT WIMBA

Wimba develops web-based collaboration software designed for online education, language learning and live interactive communications. Our collaborative applications enable learning professionals to fully embrace the new wave of teaching and learning opportunities afforded by the Internet; regardless of geographic location, bandwidth or operating system. Our classroom collaboration solutions enable educators to conduct live, online classes, meetings, office hours and other collaborations, and our language learning tools add oral interaction directly into course content, web-pages, study groups and assessments. With simplicity and power, Wimba adds new dimensions to online, accessible education, enhancing the learning experience for both students and instructors.

In this course, Mays instructs students about how to navigate the different library databases and reference guides they'll need to utilize throughout the time they're enrolled in college. Using Wimba Classroom, Mays gives guided web tours of these online library databases via application sharing. He'll open up various databases, give control to his students who are logged in from their homes or offices, and audibly instruct them about how to do their searches, all the while his students have control of his mouse and desktop.

For instance, in one class a student needs to learn how to find journal articles about ethanol, as she's doing agricultural research. He guides her through a research database until she's able to locate an applicable article in *Chemical Week*, a scientific journal. Also, during these searches, all the students logged in will audibly and textually discuss the search results as a means of consulting one another to get their opinions. This is also a great example of student-to-student collaboration. Students also learn how to export references to RefWorks, a bibliographic management program that assists students to create a bibliography using any output style required for a paper. These skills follow SCCC students even after they transfer to a four-year college or university.

With Wimba, SCCC allows its students to participate in cutting-edge research as well. For instance, SCCC offers The Genographic Project -- a Journey through Humankind, a two-credit

seminar course that is the only one of its kind in the nation. The Genographic Project is based on an unprecedented five-year research project being conducted by National Geographic. It takes students on a landmark study of the human journey -- where we came from and how we got to where we live today -- through genetic and DNA analysis that eventually provides information about our original ancestors. A highlight of the course is an online connection to Dr. Spencer Wells, scientist, geneticist, author and documentary filmmaker, who is project director for the Genographic Project at National Geographic. Wimba can provide access to many anthropologists associated with the Genographic Project. "We don't even have an anthropologist on staff at SCCC," says Mays. Wimba expands faculty access beyond the physical campus.

Though SCCC has found so many instructional and non-instructional uses of Wimba Classroom and Wimba Pronto, at the end of the day the SCCC staff is most satisfied by the fact that it can more easily expand the horizons of its students, most of whom grew up in very isolated environments.

"What I do with this technology is expose students to other classes, other faculty members, and people from other parts of the world, some of whom I met at Wimba Connect. Wimba has opened our students' eyes to the world through technology, one student at a time," says Mays.