



Wimba Creates Highly Engaging Courses at the University of Bristol

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-Andy Ramsden, Learning Technology Adviser & VLE Operational Manager, University of Bristol

In 2005, the University of Bristol launched an innovative and aggressive E-Learning Strategy. Through the use of appropriate technology, the project's aim is to enhance the student learning experience and to maintain the academic rigor of both undergraduate and postgraduate programs without compromising the output of research-active academic staff. Bristol created this initiative to ensure that it maintains its reputation for teaching excellence and to ensure that it continues to attract the best students. Bristol strives to remain at the forefront of educational provision and understands it can only do so if it draws on appropriate innovative teaching and learning technologies and utilises the best methods of programme delivery – and one of these technologies is Wimba.

The Education Support Unit (ESU) at the University of Bristol provides a university-wide service to assist the adoption and embedding of appropriate technologies in learning, teaching and research through dissemination, advice, investigations, training and support activities. ESU is the heart of the University's technology infrastruc-

ture, as faculty and staff throughout Bristol rely on it to implement technologies which foster teaching and learning. Always happy to provide individual or group training and development on a range of e-learning tools and topics, ESU is always on the lookout for technologies that will help the University's academic mission.

A long time user of the virtual learning environment (VLE), Blackboard, Bristol first turned to Wimba in 2004 because its faculty needed a significantly easier means of creating course content. Since only a few faculty were proficient in website creation tools such as Frontpage and Dreamweaver, the majority of instructors had no easy means of uploading their Word content into their VLE. Nor did they have the time or energy to learn these complicated website editing and creation applications. And since so many instructors were already using Word on a daily basis, Bristol turned to Wimba Create (then known as 'Course Genie') to be the solution for its content creation woes.



University of Bristol
Bristol, United Kingdom
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WIMBA PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

- Wimba Classroom
- Wimba Voice
- Wimba Create

KEY BENEFITS

After upgrading to the Wimba Collaboration Suite, Bristol's online courses are more engaging and its students now consider Wimba to be indispensable.

Andy Ramsden

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BRISTOL STUDENTS RELY ON WIMBA

51% of students in a Bristol survey agreed with the statement, “Being able to access recordings of my lectures has really helped my learning.” Also, 77% said that they view Wimba Classroom archives as being a safety net and an added value as a revision aid.

Bristol has been using Wimba Create since 2004 and now has 160 instructors who have downloaded, installed, and used it. Over that period, instructors in almost every discipline at the University have used it to create course content. According to Andy Ramsden, Learning Technology Adviser & VLE Operational Manager at Bristol, when training faculty, his team in the Education Support Unit focuses on the “learning design, not the button pushing, because Wimba Create is so easy to use.”

He also helps students create their own learning material in its Language Centre and in its Medicine and Dentistry programs. For example, when creating quizzes in Wimba Create, Ramsden and his team focus on the theories behind designing effective assessments and tutorials, as the actual process of creating quizzes within Wimba Create is extremely intuitive.

“Wimba Create has facilitated significant improvement in the design of the learning resources,” Ramsden says. He adds that Bristol faculty also enjoy Wimba Create’s interactive components such as questions, clear navigation structure, greater accessibility and close adherence to principles of visual design.

Students and faculty alike appreciate the fact that Wimba Create allows them to make tutorials in Word, a software with which they are already quite familiar. Further, because Wimba Create requires no web programming knowledge, it allows users to focus on the tutorial design, not the technology.

However, by end of the 2006, Bristol realised the static content within Blackboard wasn’t doing enough to keep the learner engaged. ESU realised its online courses were missing the invaluable

elements of voice, chat, and visuals that Blackboard lacks. As a result, it proudly rolled out the rest of the Wimba Collaboration Suite.

“Blackboard’s ability to support innovative teaching and learning has received a major boost by the release of a suite of voice tools developed by Wimba,” now reads Bristol’s Learning Technology Support Services webpage.

After implementing Wimba Classroom, Bristol quickly came to rely upon it to offer live online professional development and training sessions – affectionately referred to as ‘lunchbytes’ and ‘coffee breaks’ – and soon thereafter rolled it out to staff and instructors in its Faculty of Arts school for live online instruction. Adoption rapidly spread to other departments including Science, Physics, Geographical Sciences, Politics, Medical, and Social Sciences. In fact, one of Bristol’s Engineering Management courses saw upwards of 300 students use Wimba Classroom in a 3rd-year undergraduate course.

More importantly, 51% of students in a Bristol survey agreed with the statement, “Being able to access recordings of my lectures has really helped my learning.” Additionally, 77% said that they view Wimba Classroom archives as being a safety net and an added value as a revision aid.

“I don’t need a big room with support staff. It’s just me and my laptop and a cup of coffee,” Ramsden says. He believes that the ease-of-use of this “low-threshold” technology helps remove the anxiety faculty often feel when faced with learning new technologies which often lie outside of their realms of expertise.

Weeks later, to round-out the Wimba Collaboration Suite, Bristol implemented Wimba Voice. At

the very broad level, Wimba Voice facilitates and promotes vocal instruction, collaboration, coaching, and assessment. It increases the interaction and student engagement level of any online class by allowing faculty and students to easily embed vocal interactions into their online course pages.

Or as Ramsden says, "In other words, Wimba Voice will allow you and your students to easily use audio in your Blackboard courses."

"One of the advantages of using Wimba Voice for adding audio to courses is its simplicity," Ramsden says. "Wimba Voice works through the web browser, so....all you need is a microphone. This

is contrast with previous approaches which require you to save an audio file on your computer and then upload it to your course. The ease of embedding audio into your Blackboard course is evident."

"Wimba Voice's use in teaching and learning is very varied and on reflection of the interest at the University of Bristol not just associated with Language teaching. The wide potential is because of the varied number of tools within Wimba Voice," Ramsden said. It is this flexibility which makes Wimba useful to so many different departments.

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, webpages, 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.