



Increasing Enrollment and Increasing Revenue by Reaching More Students with Wimba at West Virginia University

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-Michelle Rodney, eLearning Applications Manager, West Virginia University

Since the early 2000's, West Virginia University (WVU) has rapidly expanded its online curriculum in order to better serve thousands of students who hail from throughout West Virginia and beyond. Covering a diverse array of subjects such as Nursing, Foreign Languages, Marketing, and Special Education, WVU has utilized Wimba since 2004 to be a collaborative hub for hundreds of online sections, and as a result, WVU has already seen many tangible successes.

WVU has seen clear benefits from using Wimba:

- 1) Increased enrollments by being able to reach many rural students who don't have access to high-bandwidth connections, many of whom previously had to travel to local libraries to go online.
- 2) Increased national and international enrollments by offering engaging courses live online.
- 3) Saved significant money by transitioning from satellite broadcasts in the 1990's to web-based courses. This also meant WVU no longer needs to rely on extra staff to set up satellite courses.

- 4) Now attracts guest lecturers/instructors and national experts from outside of the state. This makes for a very attractive program to help draw more students.
- 5) Student teachers can more easily receive feedback on their in-class performances and teaching techniques. By using Wimba Classroom to observe their teachers teaching around the state, WVU faculty get a clear sense of how their students are teaching in their classrooms.
- 6) Increased student engagement.
- 7) Increased student satisfaction.

Recruiting New Students

In order to attract students beyond its normal service area within the state, Rick Bebout, Integrated Marketing Communications Technology Coordinator of WVU's P.I. Reed School of Journalism, recruits students from around the world for the school's online Master's degree program in Marketing by holding online informational sessions via Wimba Classroom.



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WIMBA PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

- Wimba Classroom

KEY BENEFITS

- Increase enrollments
- Increase engagement
- Increase student satisfaction
- Attract teachers beyond the state
- Save dollars on travel costs

Michelle Rodney,
*eLearning Applications Manager,
West Virginia University*





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WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

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-Rick Bebout, Integrated Marketing Communications Technology Coordinator, West Virginia University

Thanks in-part to Wimba, in Spring 2009 the Master's program had 280 students who hail from an astounding 33 states and 8 countries.

The program also boasts 43 faculty from 15 states and 1 foreign country.

"Using Wimba Classroom, we conduct information sessions about our online program to provide an online audience a detailed, in-depth look at what our program has to offer for prospective students," says Bebout.

During these informational recruitment webinars, Bebout's team provides prospective students with in-depth information about its graduate program. Before Wimba, WVU promoted its program primarily through its website, but Bebout felt its website was too "one dimensional" and that it has a hard time conveying in-depth information about the program's curriculum, course format, and numerous other uncertainties many outsiders have about online courses.

Though WVU holds a couple of on-campus informational sessions each semester, Bebout says, "it was hard to get somebody from California, Texas, or even Northern Africa into Morgantown for a Saturday morning information session. We wanted a way that would allow us to interact with students. The solution was a lot simpler than we thought it would be. We found that Wimba Classroom could be a very powerful recruitment tool for our program to allow us to break down boundaries to reach potential students throughout the country and the world."

Nearly two years into its online recruitment process, Bebout describes this format as a success. And so do the students. Participants who attend these online informational sessions

complete a brief follow-up survey because Bebout and his team want to know how they can improve. Some recent feedback from students included:

- "The platform is easy and comfortable."
- "Knowing how easy this system is makes the idea of this program more appealing."
- "This recruitment session increased my confidence in WVU's technology."

Bebout says that a student comfortable with this technology will be more successful because he or she will be able to focus on the subject matter, not the technology.

Beyond this Master's program, WVU offers online graduate programs in Special Education for prospective teachers seeking their teaching licenses, and for practicing teachers who wish to further their careers by earning an advanced degree. While the bulk of these adult students are in-state, every semester witnesses an increase in enrollments of out-of-state students, some of whom even hail from Europe and Asia.

Using Wimba Classroom for live instruction, students specialize in programs such as Autism Spectrum Disorders, Gifted Education, and Multi-categorical Special Education. All courses include two-hour live classes on alternate weeks in Wimba Classroom during which all students interact with the instructor and their classmates. Faculty also hold virtual office hours and individually-scheduled one-on-one conferences. Every student is even assigned a mentor who works individually with him/her to provide responses to questions and feedback throughout a semester.





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-Michelle Rodney, eLearning Applications Manager, West Virginia University

Saving money and increasing student engagement

WVU's live online courses were originally based on satellite broadcasts and interactive video networks, but these were expensive and the technology was becoming dated. But with Wimba, WVU faculty could provide more access to its students

Before its webcasts, WVU students in rural areas had trouble accessing class because they didn't have access to high-speed bandwidth connections. But with Wimba, students can access their live online classes even with very low-bandwidth connections.

Increased enrollments and greater access to students

These programs are not only available throughout the state of West Virginia, but are also available nationally across the United States and have been accessed by individuals in international locations, including Iceland, Saipan, and Japan. Since some programs have been approved as part of the Southern Regional Education Board's Electronic Campus and Academic Common Market program, they are available to individuals in any location at the resident tuition rate. As a major university with a national reputation but extremely reasonable tuition rates, WVU is frequently listed as a "best buy" in quality college education.

WVU now enables learners who live beyond a reasonable traveling distance from the university to complete campus-based programs. This is a significant benefit in a very rural state such as West Virginia in which nearly 60% of the population lives in an area classified as 'rural' and where access to higher education opportunities is limited. This is also critical in a state whose

school systems experience significant difficulty recruiting special education personnel, since it recommends them to hire and train local individuals with strong ties to the community.

Online delivery has also enabled this program to extend its service area to other rural areas of the country where similar conditions exist and where the demand for special educators is also high.

An award-winning distance program

The WVU special education program is nationally recognized by the Council for Exceptional Children and won two national awards from the American Council on Rural Special Education for exemplary use of technology for personnel preparation in rural areas. Its faculty are nationally known in the discipline of special education, have significant experience in distance education, and have won awards for outstanding teaching.

The implementation of Wimba Classroom has promoted growth of the program because of its ability to deliver high-quality, interactive instruction using low-bandwidth applications which allows more individuals to participate in the program. And as the program expands its international outreach, this feature will also make it easier to reach students in rural areas across the globe, particularly those in developing countries.

Affordability for Students

Online delivery of the WVU special education programs avoids the time and expense associated with traveling to campus, paying for gas and parking (and often babysitting arrangements). The move to Wimba Classroom also allows faculty to teach from work or home and therefore has enabled the education department to avoid having to establish an additional technology fee



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to offset the costs of technical support for the program, which consequently results in lower costs for learners.

"The online delivery system saves travel time and cost for learners who now don't have to come to campus for courses and also for instructors who do not have to travel to regional sites to teach," says Michelle Rodney, eLearning Applications Manager at WVU.

"Wimba Classroom enables instructor and learners at many different widely dispersed locations to participate in live class sessions at the same time," she says.

"Wimba allows us to take advantage of expertise outside of West Virginia," Rodney continues. "For instance, we could never afford to hire [a national expert] or have her move, but she's more than willing to teach for us with Wimba. It enhances our program significantly to have a distinguished person on our faculty. We often have guest panels and it's nice because Wimba is so easy for people to use. In the past we had to have people come to campus but now if they're out of state they can just use Wimba."

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.

