



From York to Bahrain: York St John University uses Wimba to enhance the student experience

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-Simon Sweeney, Head of the Enabling E-Learning Project, York St John University

York St John University provides a vibrant centre for university education in the heart of England. In 2005, the University was awarded funding to develop a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. The Centre, Collaborating for Creativity, or C4C, supports a range of projects across the curriculum and aims to engender creativity in all aspects of higher education learning and teaching. One of the projects supported by C4C at York St John, is the Enabling E-Learning project, fondly known as EEL. Key EEL staff include, Mark Dransfield, Simon Sweeney, Diana Wetherell Terry and Steve Watson.

'The single most important priority of EEL is to facilitate greater involvement with technologies which support student learning and enhance the student experience, in particular students' sense of engagement with and membership of the university community,' said Simon Sweeney, Head of the EEL Project. 'After investigating several options we chose to work in partnership with Wimba because of their professionalism and willingness to engage with us on a pilot

basis. The relationship between University staff and Wimba staff was always very collaborative, and the technical support, advice and dedication provided by Wimba in helping us to achieve our aims was exemplary. We don't feel that our project would have been anywhere near as successful without Wimba's support.'

Since the Autumn of 2007, Wimba Classroom has been used for a number of courses including, Business of International Trade and Globalisation, the European Business Environment, the Bahrain PCAP, and the MA International Studies. Student feedback has been extremely positive, and contributed to an almost 90% pass rate in the module assessments in one course. Many students welcomed being able to access archives of Wimba Classroom sessions and were enthusiastic about the technology and the benefits on their learning. One student commented that he thought Facebook was good until he saw Wimba Classroom! Others commented that they enjoyed the flexibility and also appreciated the different mode of delivery.



York St John University
York, England
www.yorksja.ac.uk

WIMBA PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

- Wimba Classroom

KEY BENEFITS

- Increase enrollment by reaching abroad students
- Increase student engagement
- Improve pass rates
- Cut travel costs & carbon emissions

Diana Wetherell Terry teaches students in York and Bahrain using Wimba Classroom





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WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

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-Diana Wetherell Terry, Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Business and Communication, York St John University

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.

Academic staff initially reported mixed responses. There were some technical barriers to overcome and some staff were a little inexperienced in delivering effective online sessions. EEL staff addressed these issues with further training as well as reflection on the sessions with teaching staff. As a result of these interventions, and as Wimba Classroom was used more, satisfaction levels from both staff and students increased.

Simon Sweeney said, 'Wimba Classroom is a wonderful added benefit to our teaching – and makes a great deal of sense because it can be incorporated into the VLE as an archived file. This type of mixing of technologies and utilisation of a range of pedagogical approaches is what actually gives Supported Open Learning credibility in the eyes of students.'

Mark Dransfield, E-learning Advisor and EEL Project Fellow, added, 'As more and more staff and students were exposed to the potential of learning technologies, we found that staff began to think about ways in which the technology would benefit their current teaching practices. EEL works with staff to identify areas where technology could be a good solution to certain problems. For example, the English Language and Linguistics programme team uses Wimba Classroom in two of its large modules, to address large-group teaching. Wimba has the potential to involve a larger number of students than we first anticipated when this project was conceived. Use of Wimba Classroom with the English Language and Linguistics programme complements our efforts in relation to developing staff expertise in using Wimba and greatly increases the numbers of students impacted by the technology.'

One of the University's key strategic aims is to achieve financial and environmental sustainability, and Wimba Classroom helps

the University to realise this by cutting travel costs and carbon emissions. In addition, the University aims to offer alternative and flexible modes of delivery for work based, part-time and international students, and sees Wimba Classroom as a key to achieving this, by allowing tutors to conduct synchronous sessions with students from around the world.

'Wimba's main benefit is that geographical constraints are no longer barriers, meaning international collaboration and teaching becomes more realistic as the technology opens up opportunities. The pedagogical benefits of using Wimba Classroom range over several collaborative, innovative and interactive practices. It provides opportunities for meetings without boundaries, and to ask rich, insightful and challenging questions in a 'safe' environment, gain direct feedback, and to follow up with archiving for revision and later access. Wimba Classroom can link different student groups worldwide,' said Diana Wetherell Terry, Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Business and Communication, who uses Wimba Classroom to link up with Bahrain. 'This has enabled the participants to feel part of the University community and it maximizes efficiency in the creative use of technologies for the benefit of the highly qualified PCAP participants in Bahrain.'

The University has also seen a keen interest in the use of Wimba from other non-academic areas. The marketing department is investigating the use of the tool for pre-entry students, to allow them to engage in things like finance advice and welfare. There is also interest from the counseling service, for anonymous online counseling sessions. Colleagues who have been using the tool throughout the pilots have already planned and included the use of it in their taught modules for next year, they have been so impressed.