Academy of Art University

Leading U.S. design school uses Adobe® Connect™ for online courses, giving students worldwide easy access to renowned degree and certificate programs

Quality courses on-campus and online
With the cost of higher education on the rise, and student recruitment efforts becoming increasingly competitive, colleges and universities are seeking to build 21st century learning models that reach beyond the boundaries of traditional campuses. Toward that end, the Academy of Art University is using Adobe solutions to extend the physical boundaries of its San Francisco campus and enroll record numbers of students into virtual, accredited, degree and certificate programs.

The Academy of Art University prepares aspiring artists and designers for professional careers by delivering undergraduate and professional degree and certificate programs. The school follows a disciplined approach to studies that encourages students to develop individual styles that blend talents, technical skills, and creativity with professional knowledge. The university’s online programs are fully accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). With approximately 11,000 students from over 40 countries, about half of them taking one or more classes online, the university is the largest private school of art and design in the United States.

Jason Shaeffer, director of online graduate studies and synchronous services, has been involved in distance learning for the past decade. “Adobe Connect enables us to take web-based higher education to the level we always envisioned—by leveraging Adobe technology to easily reach students and prospective students worldwide,” he says.

Multiple benefits from one solution
The school uses Adobe Connect software to deliver high-quality undergraduate and graduate degree programs online, as well as certificate programs, in 11 different majors to thousands of online students worldwide. The school also uses Adobe Connect and other Adobe solutions for a variety of engaging educational activities, including live town hall-style meetings, admissions interviews, showcasing student portfolios, mentoring, and engaging current and prospective students in live question and answer sessions with administrators, staff, and faculty.

When the school evaluated software for its virtual campus, it sought a solution to enable faculty and administrators to easily engage students in two-way, rich media experiences without requiring additional downloads or proprietary plug-ins. The solution needed to be cost-effective to keep tuition and operating costs low, cross-platform compatible, easy for students and faculty to use, and scalable to meet the demands of students from around the globe. Equally important, it had to provide a sense of branding and community to better engage off-campus students in campus life.

Cost-effective student recruitment
According to Shaeffer, the online education program successfully mirrors the entire spectrum of a college campus experience, providing the same curriculum online as on-campus in subjects ranging from fashion design to sculpture. Instructors, many of whom are not technically savvy, find Adobe Connect software easy to use independent of platform.
Academy of Art University uses Adobe Connect to deliver high-quality undergraduate and graduate degree programs to thousands of online students worldwide. Students meet online to present course work and ask department directors questions about their programs. The university also uses the Adobe solution to enhance its online student recruitment efforts.

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Jason Shaeffer
Director of online studies, Academy of Art University

Since adopting Adobe Connect as its de facto distance education platform, the university has expanded online courses from 2 to more than 700 classes in five years, generating new revenue. Another important benefit is the impact on student recruitment. Statistically, the conversion rate of prospects to enrollments runs about 7% at the university. However, there is a significantly higher conversion rate, up to 30%, for online recruitment events using Adobe Connect. Rather than incur expenses to send people all over the world to hold outreach sessions, Shaeffer uses the Adobe solution to hold live chat sessions with prospects from the comfort of his office, along with support staff who field questions, disclose financial aid issues, and discuss housing options. "We can have 300 people registered in a typical recruiting chat," says Shaeffer. "After the recruiting event, we could end up with thousands of views of the posted event recordings and 290 valid leads."

According to Shaeffer, the built-in Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP) capability in Adobe Connect is the most cost-effective web conferencing solution on the market, which is just one element of the savings. Overall, he estimates the savings from online recruiting alone are significant.

"Typically, we would have to fly four to six people to Chicago, put them up in a hotel for a few days, rent out meeting space, and then hope that prospects show up," he explains. "The costs could easily total well over $10,000 per recruiting session. Compare this to our low-cost, high-quality online sessions, and the advantages to the university are evident."

Team instructional design

Every university online class is built by a three-person team—a web designer, a content editor/instructional designer, and a subject-matter expert. Approximately 150,000 pages of content comprise the virtual university. Course content is produced using Adobe Dreamweaver, Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Fireworks, and Adobe Flash Professional software. A 25-person video team has produced more than 10,000 pieces of video content to supplement the online classes. The content is then uploaded to the university’s proprietary learning management system.

Adobe Connect software is available to all program advisors and directors, who use it to mentor students, hold regularly scheduled meetings, conduct portfolio reviews, and field ad-hoc questions and answers. Faculty members have standing meeting rooms where students can share online journals and post visuals for comment and review, and where students can access recorded critiques of fellow students’ work if they were unable to attend live sessions.

To produce qualified working professionals, the university curriculum includes only best-of-breed content, with a strong focus on Adobe products. "Thanks to Adobe Connect software and the ubiquity of the free Adobe Flash Player and Adobe Reader®, our students feel like they are part of the school campus community even if they live 6,000 miles away," says Shaeffer.

For more information
www.adobe.com/products/adobeconnect