Taif University:

Innovative Teaching Through Blackboard's Digital Teaching and Learning Series

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Empowering teaching staff with the best online tools and training has become a need and a requirement to meet today's student needs. With Blackboard's Digital Teaching and Learning Series, education institutions can prepare academic staff to deliver best in class teaching and learning experiences with technology. The certification series provides academic staff with the necessary knowledge to use the online learning environment to its full capacity, transferring robust knowledge on the tools and the various alternatives available to deliver online learning. Taif University in Taif, Saudi Arabia, implemented the certification program in order to provide faculty the needed professional development to implement innovative teaching methods, motivate LMS adoption, and offer students a superior learning experience.

The Opportunity at a Glance

Challenge: To provide faculty members with the necessary development to create and facilitate innovative and positive educational experiences. The university believed this could be achieved by providing faculty members with reliable technology tools coupled with professional development, in order to ensure the transition from traditional teaching methods to more suited approaches for today's students. Higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia are witnessing an increasing demand of students. As such, developing a robust educational process has become a pressing requirement, particularly with the technology advancements that have occurred in recent years. Today's students are more open to technology and have come to expect it in their educational process. As a result, offering pedagogy that empowers educators to design and implement flexible and innovative learning solutions, have become necessary to transform university processes and systems, such as at Taif University.

Solution: Taif University rolled out the Digital Teaching and Learning Series (DTLS) in January 2019. Course dates were set in conjunction with Blackboard's team and each school was asked to nominate two faculty members to participate in the training. According to Lamia Saad Alhazmi, Assistant Professor of Management Information Systems and Vice Dean of E-Learning, faculty members enjoyed the practice sessions and sharing knowledge about the material. Prior to DTLS, the university was finding it challenging to motivate teaching staff to use their Learning Management System (Blackboard Learn), with some faculty members lacking the information on its use. Through training and workshops, the university has been able to more confidently support LMS use and adoption at the institution.

Results: So far, the university has experienced various improvements after implementing DTLS. Using technology along the education process, such as online learning for course delivery and materials, has become more evident with DTLS, with communication between faculty and students vastly improving, especially among distance students. According to Alhazmi, by motivating faculty to use the available technology, students have also become motivated to learn new skills, develop self-learning, and to use the tools available to their full advantage. Certified and trained faculty member, Dr. Fouad Jamaani, a Finance professor at the university, notes that the smoothness and practicality of the topics, as well as the instructor's knowledge has greatly empowered him to improve his teaching approach and to understand the needs of his students. "The acquired skills from the

DTLS will surely enable me to design a suitable online course that will meet the multiple needs of my students, while ensuring maximum course design efficiency," he shares. He also believes that DTLS has helped him to better understand his students' needs and to reflect those back with improved pedagogical practices thanks to the various features available on Blackboard Learn.

> "I have started to place myself in my students' shoes in every step of the design and delivery of my courses. The learned skills and tools offered by DTLS enabled me to be more understanding and tolerant to the multiple and unpredictable needs of my students. I hope to benefit from the gathered knowledge to be a better teacher or mentor to my students."
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> - Dr. Fouad Jamaani, Finance Professor, Taif University.

Dr. Tarek Alwerthan, Education professor at the University, shares that learning about all the available Blackboard features has been instrumental and plans to share that knowledge with students.

On whether the team at Taif University would recommend DTLS to other institutions, Alhazmi shares there are many advantages to using the Blackboard Learn LMS to its full capacity, which is made possible through the series. By providing teaching staff the right professional development to deliver effective online learning experiences, students deeply benefit from an educational experience that will encourage them to share their beliefs and ideas. "This teaching method makes students to be bold and to express their ideas and seek facts, more than if they were in a traditional classroom. Online education provides an opportunity for all students because they can express their opinion and voice through the communication tools available such as email, discussion boards and chat rooms."

In conclusion: To prepare higher education students for today's interconnected and highly technology-driven society, universities and academic staff must have the right tools and knowledge to deliver high quality teaching and learning experiences with technology. As Taif University has shown, having an LMS in place is only the first step to achieving best in class education. The Blackboard Digital Teaching and Learning Series promotes consistency in the pedagogy delivery across the institution and helps teaching staff feel confident in their teaching approach and delivery for 21st century learners.

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