

# e-learn



LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS/ CUSTOMER SNAPSHOT

## Enhanced instructor-student communication with Blackboard Learn

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[Keiser University](#) was started 40 years ago as a health care services-oriented school to meet the economic and workforce needs in Florida. From their first and main campus in Fort Lauderdale, Keiser has expanded to 19 campuses across Florida, one campus in Nicaragua and another in Shanghai. It is Florida's third largest private, nonprofit, regionally accredited university and provides over 100 undergraduate and graduate degree programs in Business, Criminal Justice, Health Care, Technology, Hospitality and Education.

Daniel DiStasio's job is multifaceted but he thinks of himself mainly as an English professor. At Keiser University, he is the Department Chair for General Education in the Online Division, and works with the faculty on several areas of General Education to assist them on their online class delivery. Daniel is also a Course Developer and a

member of Keiser's Instructional Design Team. He has been working in online education for nine years, six of which have been with [Blackboard](#), ever since Keiser adopted the learning management system (LMS). He spoke to E-Learn about how they optimize communication with students using the [Blackboard Learn](#) across all of Keiser University's campuses.

## The online environment in Keiser University

All campuses have face-to-face courses that are now also entirely supported by an online companion and hybrid courses, which are utilized to collect grades and to offer an online component to students. Within that scope, the Online Division has its own students, who can earn their degrees entirely online. Keiser offers up to three hundred online classes per month, which students in all campuses can access.



Daniel DiStasio at Keiser University. Ft. Lauderdale, USA. Photo: AFP Andrew Innerarity.

## Using Blackboard Learn tools to optimize communication with students

Keiser offers four-week intense courses that typically require the students' engagement on discussion boards at least three days a week. The discussions are all graded and usually there's a minimum time requirement for when the instructor has to reply to the student. In order for the communication to be fluent, it is very important that throughout the course and in particular on the discussion boards, that reply time is quick to engage the student in the topic at hand. Multimedia content can also be shared through discussion boards, so it is recommended to avoid only using text, as even the smallest visual support makes a big difference.

These requirements help strengthen the communication between instructors and students by taking their interactions one step further. For example, when asking specific questions while interpreting a poem or a literary fragment, students should think for themselves instead of paraphrasing. The instructor can then configure the

discussion so that students can only view other threads after they write a post about the topic that is being discussed, which can have surprising results compared to just asking students to write voluntarily. Discussion boards are a course participation component that is graded, therefore, full discussion content is only available for one week to encourage rich interactions within that timeframe. For discussions that may need to be referred back to for the entirety of the course, instructors can change the student settings from “participant” to “reader” and have the contents always available for review. Lastly, instructors can subscribe to threads so that when a student posts a question, they are instantly notified via e-mail to answer as soon as possible.

At Keiser, instructors are also required to offer one-hour live sessions each week using [Blackboard Collaborate](#), which can be recorded and available at any time. It is common at the beginning for instructors to display a PowerPoint presentation and talk through it at first. In Professor DiStasio’s experience, his understanding and use of the tool has changed over time. He currently takes students via screen sharing to the online classroom itself to be able to read, reflect and discuss each assignment. He can share Microsoft Word documents, and if there is an assignment, he can demonstrate how he would have approached it. Some courses at Keiser require students to deliver speeches and oral presentations using their webcams. And, when students require assistance, Blackboard Collaborate allows the instructor to hold one-on-one sessions, and some even use it to record instructions or sessions that are saved and archived for the students to view later.

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Across different campuses, as is the case at Keiser, the use of a single LMS makes the online classroom experience totally seamless for instructors as well as students. Today, for any course, whether on-campus or not, students are all enrolled through the same LMS version. Moreover, the university library is fully online and for every discipline and course, students and staff have access to endless resources. In the case of the Nicaragua campus for instance, Keiser has an entire Latin-American division where students can earn their undergraduate to master’s degree fully in Spanish, while having access to resources from all other campuses.

*Professor Daniel DiStasio – Department Chair for General Education at Keiser University.*

*Photo by: AFP Andrew Innerarity.*