

PROFILE

Name: California State University, Monterey Bay
Type: Public
Location: Marina, California
www.csumb.edu

CHALLENGE

Design classrooms that will help all instructors, regardless of teaching style, engage students.

SOLUTION

Epson BrightLink® Pro 1430Wi, paired with Extron ShareLink, provides an interactive, flexible classroom tool that caters to a variety of teaching and learning styles. Students are engaged, teachers are untethered, and maintenance and repairs are streamlined.

A Laboratory for Instruction

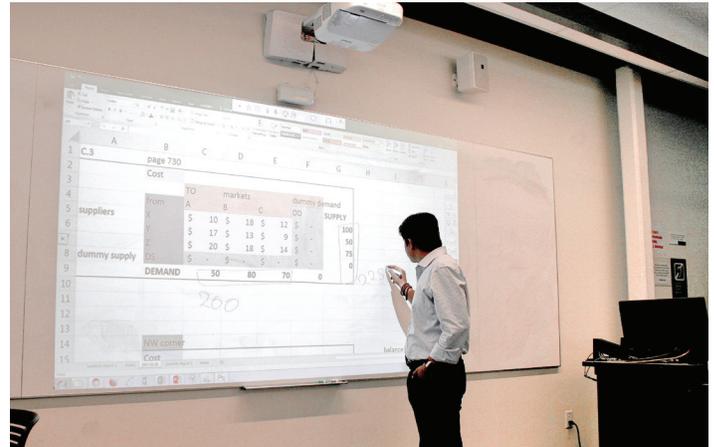
Experimental Classroom Helps CSU Monterey Bay Put Technology to Work for All of Their Professors, No Matter How They Prefer to Teach

It's a tough problem. How do you design classrooms that will help all of your instructors engage their students, no matter what their teaching styles?

At California State University Monterey Bay, the answer has come out of an R&D classroom where a cadre of 20–30 innovative faculty members take turns experimenting with new systems as they teach semester-long classes.

“We use the room as a place where we can initiate change and open doors, using technology that is affordable and sustainable,” explains Marc Oehlman, Associate Director, Center for Academic Technologies.

The university has put what they've learned to work in a new Joel and Dena Gambord Business and Information Technology building that opened in Fall of 2015. It's a showcase with beautiful glass-walled classrooms and computer labs, each equipped with powerful Epson BrightLink Pro interactive technology. Professors have found the new classrooms adapt easily to a variety of teaching styles, from the traditional to the highly collaborative, helping them be their best while engaging students across the board.



Crucial Advantages

The new Gambord building is home to both the College of Business and the School of Computing and Design, a combination applauded for the opportunities it provides for shared IT and business classes. It includes eleven seminar-sized classrooms, 5 computer labs, and a 104-seat auditorium.

“With Epson and Extron technology, students can go several steps beyond just joining a class discussion.”

The smaller seminar rooms each have one BrightLink Pro 1430Wi projecting onto a 100” diagonal projectable board. The larger rooms, which are wider than they are deep, have two, positioned so that everyone has a good view of the projection.

The BrightLink Pro offers four crucial advantages for instructors and students:

- Those who prefer to write on a whiteboard can do so with 'digital ink,' making it easy to send the instructor's notes to students or post them on Moodle, CSU's online learning management system.
- Those who use PowerPoint or other electronic materials can control the computer from the whiteboard, since the BrightLink Pro acts like a giant tablet computer.
- Instructors can even mark up PowerPoint presentations and other materials onscreen, emphasizing points as they speak.
- During recaps of group projects and in discussion sessions, it's easy for students to connect from their laptops and mobile devices to the BrightLink Pro. That's possible with the BrightLink used on its own, but the Academic Technologies group added an Extron ShareLink collaboration gateway to make the process even easier.

Oehlman says student connectivity is crucial to a goal of encouraging faculty to use more collaborative teaching methods. With Epson and Extron technology, students can go several steps beyond just joining a class discussion. They can use their devices to share their work in class exercises, share material they've found in online research, and make presentations. Multiple students can make group presentations as well, sharing one or two electronic markers per BrightLink to control their devices or make notes. In the classrooms with two BrightLinks, they can use the screens separately or in tandem, maximizing their flexibility as they present to the class.

Academic Technologies collaborated with Space Planning and Academic Scheduling to maximize the flexibility of each classroom. First, they outfitted the rooms either with wheeled chairs with an attached work surface or tables and chairs with wheels. Either way, instructors and students can reconfigure a room quickly, even in the middle of class, for a variety of discussion and workgroup formats.

In addition, the classrooms' glass walls serve as floor-to-ceiling writing surfaces, very useful for group projects. Yet unlike dedicated learning studios, which share many of the same features, the classrooms in the Gambord building adapt to whatever methodology the instructor finds most comfortable.

Kurt Henne, AV Equipment Coordinator, says he does not believe many faculty started the fall term using the BrightLink's interactive features, but by December most had

Sticking with Projection

The BrightLink Pro Has Significant Advantages Over Alternative Technologies, Says CSU Instructional Technologies Expert

Kurt Henne, who has served as AV Equipment Coordinator at California State University Monterey Bay for almost 20 years, says the Epson BrightLink Pro has significant advantages over touch-sensitive, interactive flat panel displays.

First, very large, interactive flat panels are still prohibitively expensive. To save on costs, many schools will purchase smaller sizes, but a 55" or even a 70" display is not big enough for a room designed for 20+ students. "Those sitting toward the back just can't read what's on those screens," Henne explains.

Second, some interactive flat panels are problematic in rooms with windows. While the image from this kind of display will be quite good if no light falls on the screen, glare from sunlight or even overhead lights can make them unreadable.

Third, maintenance can be challenging and expensive. "If you have to remove a 70" display from a classroom wall, that's going to take two or three people," Henne says. "And then you still have to ship it back to the manufacturer for service." Because of their cost and time to service, few universities can afford to keep replacements on hand. "That means you may have nothing in that classroom until it's fixed."

The BrightLink Pro solves all of these problems. The image is bright and readable, even in a room with windows, the projectors are easy to ship, exchange, and receive immediate warranty attention and, at a fraction of the cost of a large interactive flat panel, CSU Academic Technologies can keep extras on hand for any emergency.

tried them. Henne led training sessions starting in August, made himself available anytime anyone had questions, and says encouragement from those who had taught in the R&D classroom was a big help as well. “One reason we like the BrightLink is that it’s so much easier to use than other interactive whiteboards,” he explains. “Once instructors decide they’re going to try it, there’s not much of a learning curve.”

A New Classroom Standard

Henne says the technology used in the Gambord building will become the standard for all seminar-sized classrooms on campus. In addition to one or two BrightLink Pros, they will include an Extron switcher and amplifier, JBL speakers, and the Extron ShareLink gateway.

Henne says the school has standardized on Epson products since 1998, and will continue to use their high-brightness projectors in lecture halls and auditoriums. “There’s still a place for ceiling-mounted projectors and larger screens mounted up high, especially for freshman lectures,” he explains. Yet for upper-level classes, he feels the interactivity of the BrightLink is crucial.

With the Gambord building in use for 18 months, Oehlman and his staff at Academic Technologies are already looking at lessons learned from Gambord. “While the notion is to provide an opportunity for instructors to innovate, without encouraging resistance by forcing people onto a path they are not comfortable with, we have encountered challenges along the way. As the Gambord building is also an interdisciplinary space, the resident faculty who helped design the spaces have adapted well, but faculty from across other disciplines are often challenged by the newness of these spaces in contrast with the rest of the campus” Oehlman explains. “We’re not afraid of making changes, especially when our design or assumptions have been shown to have gaps. That said—our challenges are not with the technologies.”

“At the end of the day, it’s all about providing a better learning experience for our students and new opportunities for faculty and their instruction. Our new classroom standard will let us do just that.”

Henne says the school has standardized on Epson products since 1998. “Because Monterey Bay is a small town, two hours from San Francisco, we are very dependent on our vendors. Yet the Epson product is very reliable. We have projectors I bought 13 years ago that are still in use.” Better still, any needed service is fast and easy. “I can call down to Long Beach, give the serial number, and no questions asked, I’ll have a replacement overnight.”

It’s important too, Henne says, that Epson has listened carefully to what he and other educators have asked for. “Years ago, no manufacturer had closed captioning, but we needed it to meet ADA requirements. I met Epson’s director of sales at InfoComm and told him about the problem, and also mentioned it was too hard to change the lamp if a projector was ceiling mounted. When the next models were introduced, both issues were fixed.”

Henne adds that when he recommends Epson products to other educators, they are always happy with the purchase. “They make life simple. I don’t have to worry when I use Epson products.”

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– KURT HENNE, AV EQUIPMENT COORDINATOR,
CENTER FOR ACADEMIC TECHNOLOGIES