

"The only thing which satisfies an immortal soul is the pursuit of an endless goal."
James Blaisdell

Claremont Graduate University Creates Collaborative Learning Space with ViewSonic® ViewBoard® Interactive Displays



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— Michael Thomas, Director of Educational Technology and Client Services

INTERVIEWED

- ▶ Michael Thomas, Director of Educational Technology and Client Services

INDUSTRY

- ▶ Education

CHALLENGE

- ▶ Create a collaborative learning space suited for university-level education

SOLUTION

- ▶ One 86" ViewSonic ViewBoard IFP8650 display
- ▶ Four 75" ViewSonic ViewBoard IFP7550 displays
- ▶ Two ViewSonic LS820 short-throw laser projectors
- ▶ 40 laptops

PROFILE

Located 35 miles east of Los Angeles, Claremont Graduate University is a private all-graduate research university in Claremont, California. Founded in 1925, CGU is a member of the Claremont Colleges, which includes five undergraduate (Pomona, Claremont McKenna, Harvey Mudd, Scripps and Pitzer) and two graduate (CGU and Keck Graduate Institute of Applied Life Sciences) institutions of higher education. CGU offers an intimate, high-touch academic research environment. The university's unique brand of graduate-only scholarship transcends traditional disciplinary boundaries to foster the creation of new knowledge—and new ways of seeing and improving the world.

CHALLENGE

Interactive displays have become a gold standard for technology in K-12 education by empowering students and instructors to communicate and collaborate in ways that have been shown to increase educational outcomes and prepare students for career success. Would it be possible then, wondered Claremont Graduate University's leadership team, for this technology to be applied to the unique environment of their institution?

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RESULTS

- ▶ Huddle spaces provide efficient stations for group work.
- ▶ Large screens increase visibility throughout the classroom.
- ▶ Modular furniture and cart-mounted displays offer easy flexibility.
- ▶ Exceeded the expectations of faculty, IT staff and CGU leadership team.
- ▶ In high demand by faculty; was fully booked prior to COVID closures.
- ▶ Faculty have saved time and increased student collaboration.
- ▶ Provides collaborative space for board meetings, special events and faculty/staff training.

What started off as a thought experiment quickly became reality when CGU board members, Trustee Wen Chang and university president Len Jessup met with ViewSonic leadership to discuss different possibilities. The members greenlit a project that would eventually become known as the Advanced Learning Environment (ALE), a room outfitted with several ViewSonic® ViewBoard® interactive displays and short-throw laser projectors, along with enough laptops to accommodate every student. If it worked as anticipated, it would become the prototype for future classrooms.

But before the ALE could change the way CGU approached technology, it first needed to pass muster with the IT team that would be responsible for implementation. Associate Vice President of Finance and Administration/Technology Services and Information Systems Manoj Chitre admits to being skeptical at first.

“ViewBoard displays have great capabilities and deliver a terrific, immersive classroom experience that’s great for K-12 education,” said Chitre. “As a graduate-only institution it wasn’t immediately apparent how our faculty would use the devices. I wondered, how applicable would they be to our class settings?”

Michael Thomas, Director of Educational Technology and Client Services, was of a similar mindset.

“These tools, the ViewBoard displays and myViewBoard™ software, were specifically designed for K-12,” said Thomas. “We were assured by the ViewSonic team that the software would translate well to pedagogy for adults and that it would be regularly updated for this use.”

With all the relevant stakeholders onboard with the project, the IT and leadership teams went to work.

SOLUTION

The ALE was envisioned as an interactive space where teachers could have the flexibility to expand their teaching methods and foster creativity and collaboration individually and in groups.

ViewSonic worked with the CGU team to determine the best technology to bring this collaborative vision to life, ultimately selecting five interactive displays – an 86" ViewSonic® ViewBoard® IFP8650 to serve as the “teaching display” and four 75" ViewSonic ViewBoard IFP7550 displays for use by students – all featuring 4K Ultra HD resolution and immersive 20-point touchscreens. For flexibility, each display was mounted on a cart to enable teachers to move them around the room as desired. Two ViewSonic LS820 short-throw laser projectors and 40 laptops rounded out the room.

“We knew that for this room to embody our vision it needed to be highly versatile,” said Thomas. “My philosophy is that technology alone isn’t always the solution and to achieve our goals every element of the room needed to contribute to the modularity. To achieve this, CGU leadership ultimately invested in a complete remodel of the space.”

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IFP50

- ▶ 4K Ultra HD resolution display
- ▶ 20-point immersive touchscreen
- ▶ myViewBoard™ annotation software
- ▶ ViewBoard Cast streaming software

LS820

- ▶ Ultra-short throw projector
- ▶ 1080p resolution
- ▶ Color accuracy delivers an amazing cinema-like experience
- ▶ Utilizing the latest laser light technology

With financial backing from the University's board, the team gave the room a modern makeover to make it more accessible for students. Whereas before there was a typical 800 sq. ft. lab with rows of tables and chairs, there now stood a vibrant, cutting-edge technology center. An electrified glass wall provided a sense of openness but also doubled as a privacy filter by being opaque at the push of a button. Window blinds (which normally took minutes to close) became motorized and could be remotely raised and lowered as a group. A browser-based system provided hassle-free room scheduling and cut down on many of the conflicts that came with booking a regular meeting space.

"The old room was very static. This one is modular and modern," said Thomas. "The furniture is modular and easy to reconfigure. The ViewBoard displays are on rolling carts. Everything can be easily changed up to accommodate different needs."

The CGU IT team completed the installation during the summer of 2019. In September, the Advanced Learning Environment was officially open for use. With help from ViewSonic, the IT team laid the groundwork for a successful launch.

"ViewSonic helped train my team members, who became trainers for the faculty," said Thomas. "We also created documentation on how to use the tools and software in the room, including recommendations on how to use these resources for different teaching modalities."

RESULTS

The ALE quickly became one of the most popular spots on campus, with five months of increasing use before the university shut down in March of 2020 to slow the spread of COVID-19.

"Pre-pandemic the ALE was being used daily by faculty across the campus," said Thomas. "The Statistics professors were the first to use it extensively, but soon it was being used for every type of class as well as for board meetings, special events and training faculty and staff from our sister schools."

It was so in-demand, says Thomas, that they regularly had to turn people away.

"This room provides the faculty with capabilities they didn't have in the past, and it's changing the way they teach," he said. "Some use all the displays at once, for upgraded one-to-many teaching. For example, this approach is good for classes that use the Socratic method, and it adds visibility for vision-impaired students. Many use the displays separately for breakouts and group work, then have the students share their work onto the large screens using myViewBoard software."

In Professor Brian Hilton's Geographic Information Systems (GIS) class, ViewSonic ViewBoard displays have particularly been effective at saving time for both himself and his students. Consider this "then" versus "now" snapshot of group work in Hilton's classes with and without the large screen huddle spaces.

"Before I had these resources to use, groups of students would share a single laptop to create the assigned GIS maps or apps. To demonstrate their work, they had to come to the front of the room, login to their account and find the correct content – all before they could begin discussing it, all of which took time," said Hilton. "Now each group works at a large ViewSonic ViewBoard display, which has many benefits."

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“First of all, it gets them up and moving, getting into groups around their display – a good outcome for evening classes where almost everyone is coming from work at the end of a long day. They then proceed as before with the exercise, but since the screen is large, they have the ability to work together rather than just watch one person manipulate the application. Then, when it’s time for their demonstration, we just move between groups – it’s much more efficient.”



Hilton also talked about another unanticipated bonus, “The groups at each display can easily see what the others are doing, which creates some useful friendly competition.”

The results lived up to the high expectations that the CGU leadership had for the room. What the team couldn’t have anticipated was how useful the ALE would become in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

“This room has proved valuable in so many ways we didn’t imagine,” said Chitre. “For one thing, it was an ideal environment for training faculty in online learning tools and techniques before going home in March.”

“For another,” said Chitre, “ViewBoard displays have proven invaluable in facilitating remote teaching in new ways at the outset of the 2020-2021 school year, with the campus closed and the university offering online flexible learning.

“Some faculty can’t or don’t want to teach from home,” he said. “We’ve been able to bring them on campus and enable them to use the big screens to connect with remote students. They can talk to them easily and present through the ViewBoard displays. It’s really been a blessing for them.”

The combination of Zoom plus the ViewSonic ViewBoard displays has been tremendous, added Thomas.

“These tools together have been a huge win this fall for the faculty teaching from campus,” he said. “They wanted to be in a classroom to teach but many found it awkward lecturing on Zoom to an empty room. When we set them up on the ViewBoard displays with webcams and they were able to see a large gallery of their students’ faces and have bidirectional conversations -- definitely a more enjoyable teaching and learning experience.”

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To maximize this benefit, the ViewBoard displays were moved to individual classrooms.

According to Thomas, whether it was late 2019, during the transition to remote learning, or in its current distributed locations, feedback has been “overwhelmingly fantastic.”

“The faculty really enjoy the modularity of the ALE and the touchscreen aspect of the displays has been one of the biggest wins,” he said. “The screens are absolutely gorgeous and the touchscreen capabilities are outstanding. We’ve had nothing but positive feedback about the displays.”



All in all (pandemic notwithstanding), the faculty’s expectations were overwhelmingly met, says Thomas.

“The professors really enjoy having a top tier, cutting-edge space that gives them so much teaching flexibility,” he said. “We’re looking forward to extending the concept and are working with ViewSonic to acquire more ViewBoard displays.”

The IT team has also been offering demos of the ALE for CGU’s sister colleges.

“Scripps just bought three and CMC is also in the process acquiring some ViewSonic ViewBoards,” he said. “I’m looking forward to getting more – a lot more.”