Western Sydney University Teams Up with Zoom and AARNet to Transform its Collaborative Online Culture

Challenge: WSU relied on a mix of complex communications solutions, including several expensive hardware systems that were reaching end of life.

Solution: Deploy Zoom and Zoom Rooms across their eight campuses.

Result: Video collaboration increased by 400% while costs dropped dramatically.

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Western Sydney University (WSU) is one of Australia's leading academic institutions. Based in Western Sydney, it boasts eight campuses that serve 43,000 students. The university has a growing international program and strong community ties with its regional home in Western Sydney, the fastest-growing population center in Australia. WSU is listed as one of the top 500 universities in the world by Times Higher Education (THE) , and in their top 100 universities under 50 years of age.

To support this thriving institution, WSU has deployed Zoom throughout their campuses. We spoke with Geoff Lambert, Senior Project Manager for Information Technology and Digital Services at WSU, about the university, their communications technology strategy, and their switch to Zoom.

For years, WSU used a mix of video communications solutions: traditional hardware conference room systems along with a web conferencing sourced from their learning management system (LMS). They were facing several problems with these systems. "The LMS option," said Lambert, "wasn't great, but it was what we had. Generally, we were very disappointed with web conferencing and staff did their best to avoid it. As for the conference rooms, the systems worked well enough, but they were reaching end of life, as all hardware eventually does, and were going to be extremely expensive to replace."

"We also wanted to decrease time spent driving between campus, and evaluate more reliable tools for on-line, real time teaching and research." At the same time as they were facing these challenges, there was an enthusiastic organic growth of Zoom among about 30 users at WSU.

What took Zoom from 30 users to a full university deployment? It started when Lambert and his team turned to their friends at Australia's Academic and Research Network (AARNet), which

provides high speed, congestion-free networking services for educational and research institutions throughout Australia. AARNet hosts Zoom on its network, providing universities such as WSU with the best possible video conference experience, local Zoom support, and Zoom cloud recording integration with its storage application CloudStor.

What else helped get Zoom into the classroom and meeting rooms throughout WSU? Well, how about the fact that Zoom rocks? **"It has great performance, an easy user interface, and extremely low cost of ownership. The Zoom Rooms, in particular, have saved us about $1.5 million plus maintenance costs compared to if we had just refreshed the existing hardware. Not only that, usage of the same rooms went up by 400% when we traded out the traditional hardware for Zoom Rooms and its easy iPad interface,"** said Lambert.

Lambert's team also appreciated **Zoom's responsiveness to requests.** WSU has made various feature requests and suggestions that Zoom has fulfilled, including improved whiteboarding, polling, security group controls, hand raise, and waiting room. "There has been an amazing turn around on our functionality requests. **The waiting room is particularly useful for our student support services, enabling private student consultations** without the inconvenience of password protecting meetings," Lambert explained.

In early 2015, WSU signed up for a site license of Zoom covering both staff and students. **They saw Zoom usage climb steadily month on month. Two years later, over 5000 staff and students are hosting Zoom meetings totaling over half a million meeting minutes each month.** With robust desktop and mobile meetings in place, Lambert's team shifted their attention to their conference rooms. They piloted Zoom Rooms as a replacement for the traditional room systems. WSU initially migrated 35 traditional conference rooms to Zoom Rooms. With subsequent demand they increased this to more than 80 Zoom Rooms, plus 24 collaborative learning studios running Zoom, where they are implementing flipped

classes. In addition, WSU still has 21 Zoom H.323/SIP Connectors linking their remaining Legacy conference room systems into the Zoom cloud. WSU is phasing out these legacy rooms over the next couple of years and replacing them with Zoom Rooms, so the H.323/SIP Connectors allow them to continue to join these rooms into Zoom meetings until they can finish the transition.

Western Sydney University uses Zoom for a variety of uses cases.Their academics use Zoom for online teaching and tutorials, as well as Zoom Video Webinars in their nursing and midwifery programs. The sessions can be recorded to the cloud and stored on the AARNet storage infrastructure. Zoom has become a vital tool for research, allowing WSU and other universities to work together on projects. **Zoom's high reliability in low bandwidth environments and the AARNet infrastructure have allowed WSU faculty to connect with peers in 25 countries simultaneously.**

With all these new use cases, "The biggest achievement is the transformation in the culture and staff expectation of meeting online throughout the University," said Lambert. "It's become so successful that it can be hard to schedule a meeting any more without at least someone wanting to participate via Zoom. While still early days for our teaching real time online, this cultural confidence in our platform is a critical foundation, and one we could not have achieved without AARNet and Zoom."