



While the Professor's Away the Kids Won't Play: Kansas State University Faculty Teach Remotely with Wimba

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-Christina L. Gawlik, Graduate Teaching Assistant and University Supervisor, Department of Elementary Education, Kansas State University

Kansas State University is a large state university in every sense. Ranked as one of the nation's "cutting-edge schools" according to Kaplan Publishing's *You Are Here: A Guide to Over 380 Colleges and Unlimited Paths to Your Future*, "K-State" offers 65 masters degrees, 45 doctoral degrees and 22 graduate certificates in multiple disciplines to more than 23,000 students from all 50 states and more than 90 countries. Its 250+ undergraduate majors keep its students busy academically, while its Big-12 Conference varsity sports, numerous club sports, and 450 student organizations help its students busy when they're out of the classroom. K-State also ranks first nationally among state universities in its total of Rhodes, Marshall, Truman, Goldwater, and Udall scholars since 1986, earning K-State a place among the nation's elite universities.

And these broad strokes have carried over to K-State's online environment.

K-State has one of the largest online offerings of any school in the world. As of the Fall 2008 semester, more than 2,000 of its face-to-face

classes had an online component, and the university offered nearly 150 hybrid courses 350 purely online distance courses, relying on Axio to be the hub of its online courses. With Axio, faculty can post syllabi, course notes, and PowerPoint slides, while students can communicate via message boards. But since 2007, K-State has also relied heavily on the Wimba Collaboration Suite to foster significantly more collaboration between students and instructors in disciplines ranging from agriculture to education.

According to Bryan Vandiviere, Web Presentation Technology Coordinator at Kansas State University, more than 900 faculty use either Wimba Classroom or Wimba Voice to bring a collaborative elements to their online courses. In fact, more than 700 courses count on Wimba each semester.

As the primary support person for Wimba at K-State, Vandiviere proudly boasts that he can support all faculty by just himself and few work-study students. "In the Fall 2007 semester alone, Kansas



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WIMBA PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

- Wimba Classroom
- Wimba Voice

KEY BENEFITS

- Allows 900+ faculty to teach live online in all subject matters
- Faculty teach even when traveling
- Only 1 full-time person needed to support all faculty and all students
- High student satisfaction rates

Bryan Vandiviere,
*Web Presentation Technology Coordinator,
Kansas State University*





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WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

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State University faculty combined to hold 696 live classes and created 759 archives via Wimba Classroom," Vandiviere said happily. "Amazingly, all of this was supported by only one full-time technology staff member and three students."

But beyond being so easy to use and support, the value of Wimba is really seen when faculty – both technology gurus and novices – quickly see how collaborative courses help their students succeed.

Christina L. Gawlik, a Graduate Teaching Assistant and University Supervisor in K-State's Department of Elementary Education, is one such instructor.

Gawlik recently completed a research study titled, *Online Virtual Classrooms: See me, hear me, show me: Opportunities for distance learning, in which she addresses the ways which "distance education can be taken to a new level using improved technology that is readily available to all participants in the vivid technology age."* And when she mentions 'improved technology,' she's referring to Wimba.

Gawlik acknowledges professors must often travel and miss classes for professional or personal reasons and says that "Wimba Classroom offers an alternative approach to teach class online with the ability for both teacher and student to see and hear each other through the use of web cameras, microphones, and speakers. Students and teachers can share files, break out into discussion rooms, collect data from simple polls, and much more."

Too often professors are forced to cancel class due to professional development opportunities, meetings, or appointments that conflict with their regularly scheduled class sessions. For example, as an instructor of a math methods course for

elementary school teachers at a university, such obligations impacted Gawlik's teaching availability on-campus during her regularly scheduled class time. She wanted to continue teaching her class while she traveled in order to cover all necessary content before the end of the semester. Therefore, she was excited to learn about and take advantage of Wimba Classroom.

"As an instructor, I was pleasantly accepted to present at a regional conference servicing mathematics educators," Gawlik said. "The conference schedule required me to be out of town during a class session. To my students' dismay, I was not interested in canceling or rescheduling class due to my absence from the university campus. I required students to meet me online using Wimba Classroom for our virtual lesson, discussing number sense and different types of addition problems."

Earlier in the semester Gawlik had run her students through the basics of using Wimba Classroom. Her students "quickly picked up the functions of Wimba Classroom with ease," creating confidence in her plan to host class virtually when duty calls for her to be elsewhere.

Then it was time to teach her students from her hotel room on the road.

"After making individualized greetings, I determined the virtual class was up and running and students were ready for a fun filled lesson," she excitedly recalled.

"We began class as usual, discussing mathematical content and implications of teaching. Number sense and different types of addition problems were the content strands addressed in this lesson, which was guided by an uploaded PowerPoint



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ABOUT WIMBA

Wimba develops web-based collaboration software designed for online education, language learning and live interactive communications. Our collaborative applications enable learning professionals to fully embrace the new wave of teaching and learning opportunities afforded by the Internet; regardless of geographic location, bandwidth or operating system. Our classroom collaboration solutions enable educators to conduct live, online classes, meetings, office hours and other collaborations, and our language learning tools add oral interaction directly into course content, webpages, study groups and assessments. With simplicity and power, Wimba adds new dimensions to online, accessible education, enhancing the learning experience for both students and instructors.

presentation. To ensure student participation, I individually called on students to answer questions or contribute to class deliberations."

Throughout the class she offered numerous polls and asked for constant audio, visual, and textual feedback from her students, leaving her satisfied. "Overall, I was impressed with the ease of holding class online. I particularly like using a web camera to see the person speaking," she said.

After having a successful live remote class, Gawlik immediately understood that Wimba Classroom can be used in so many other ways besides just holding classes. From live online office hours, study groups, meetings, and professional development sessions, it's a great product for almost any kind of collaboration. Gawlik even plans to use Wimba Classroom to offer attendance to her future conference presentations.

"Professors no longer need to sit in their office to host office hours that students may not be able to attend to due scheduling conflicts or time constraints. This was specifically beneficial one evening when I was making dinner. I heard a student call out, 'Good evening, this is Brandon. Are you there?' I swiftly turned down the stove, walked over to my laptop, turned on my web camera, and began addressing the students' questions."

Going forward, Gawlik, despite sounding lighthearted, says she'll no longer accept the excuse, "I Couldn't Make it to Class because..." Because Wimba Classroom is accessible from any location that has internet access, she now knows her students can participate in class from the convenience of any location.

Perhaps more impressive, Gawlik surveyed her students at the end of the semester and found

overwhelmingly positive results when she asked about their experiences using live online collaborative technology. She found that 95% of her students strongly agreed or agreed when asked if they thought Wimba Classroom was easy to use after learning its functions. She also found that 80% of her students strongly agreed or agreed believed that Wimba Classroom is an effective tool to be used for distance education. One student even said, "The Wimba Classroom was very fun and easy to use once we were introduced to it. It was an effective tool that we could use to communicate our thoughts as whole, but be dispersed individually."

As K-State continues to climb the ranks of the elite public universities, its ascension will hasten as it furthers its already-innovative online learning programs. By allowing its diverse faculty to use the Wimba Collaboration Suite to add vital collaborative elements to their courses, their students will receive the high-quality K-State education to which they're accustomed – even if they aren't on campus. Gawlik sums it up best when she describes how students, literally anywhere with an internet connection, can fully participate in her classes – whether they like it or not.

"If they are sick, they can attend from the comforts of home, possibly in their favorite reclining chair. Or if their car broke down on the way to campus and was towed to the auto shop at Walmart, they can access free wireless internet on their laptop they had in their backpack," says Gawlik, perhaps to her students' dismay. "I even had a student suggest using a computer in the electronics section of the store, pretending to be a potential customer as they wait on their car to be fixed."