

Information, Courses, Community: Fostering Student Engagement with MyArcadia

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About Arcadia University

Arcadia University, founded in 1853, is a private, coeducational comprehensive university in suburban Philadelphia offering undergraduate and graduate study to more than 3,400 students annually. The Arcadia University Center for Education Abroad, ranked second in the country and recognized by *U.S. News and World Report* for its outstanding programs, is one of the largest campus-based international study programs in the United States, serving an additional 2,000 students each year from nearly 300 American colleges and universities. U.S. News also ranks the University among the top colleges and universities in the North and Barron's has named Arcadia a "best buy" for the past 12 years.

Background

In 2001, Arcadia University launched an Intranet site to provide information to faculty, students and staff. In the fall of 2001 the university also adopted Blackboard as their learning management system. The Intranet and Blackboard were two distinct sites. Faculty and staff found the Intranet site very useful to get updated information from academic and administrative units, but the students were not using the site.

Intranet Site (ArcadiaNet)

We developed our Intranet site to provide specific content to the campus community. The site mainly consisted of HTML content. For security we used the Windows permissions structure. With the permissions we were able to restrict access to content to a specific group or groups of users. The site contained:

- Web Pages for administrative and academic units
- Events Calendar
- Online forms
- Links for emails, and other web sites

Blackboard Basic

In fall 2001 we also implemented the Blackboard basic system version 5.5 which provided the infrastructure for our faculty to post online content for their courses. The system was well re-

ceived by faculty and students. With the growth in Blackboard and ArcadiaNet we starting seeing a clear disconnect between these two systems. Students were only using the Blackboard system because they were driven there for their course content. The number of students who used ArcadiaNet was small, and this was an issue for the university as most of the content was for students and they were not taking advantage of this. Blackboard was used by students, faculty and staff for:

Online course content
Online organizations

In the summer of 2003 the Office of Information Technology made the decision to consolidate ArcadiaNet and Blackboard into a single site. We decided to link ArcadiaNet with Blackboard and make it a single point of entry to both systems. Nearly all of the students need to access Blackboard on a regular basis so it was a better solution for distributing the information. This move was only possible with the move to the Blackboard Learning System from Blackboard Basic. IT also realized that this new solution would be mission critical and invested in hardware to support high availability with both the database and web servers.

MyArcadia

In the spring of 2004, the university launched MyArcadia, the campus web portal. MyArcadia gives students, faculty, and staff access to online courses and departmental web sites. The portal is also the main source for campus announcements and event listings, and provides a single sign-on link to campus email. Initially when we launched MyArcadia, we only had a link to Outlook Web Access (OWA) which opened up in a new window, but the students, faculty and staff had to login again. Since we were using Active Directory to authenticate users on the portal, we worked with Blackboard Inc. to pass the user credentials to OWA to make it a true single sign-on system.

Engaging Students with MyArcadia

The portal has been very effective in driving students to this site to get the latest information about their courses, campus events and announcements. The students feel empowered by the ability to customize the modules and the content to make it relevant to them. We did student focus groups to get their opinion on what content they would like to see on the portal. One of the other big draws to the portal is that we use it as a gateway for online registration and viewing of grades. Students never need to remember multiple URLs on campus, all they need is the URL for the portal where we have links to all the other campus resources and web sites. Access to all the electronic resources from the library is available to faculty and students anywhere, anytime. Students studying abroad also find the resources, news, and Events listed on MyArcadia helpful to keep connected with the Glenside campus.



Summary of features on MyArcadia

- Single campus URL for students to remember
- Posting current information online and directing students to the updated content
- Engaging student clubs and organizations to use this tool
- Campus Announcements
- Events Calendar
- Campus academic and administrative departmental information
- Online forms
- Links to other university publications and web sites
- Link to online registration (SCT-PowerCampus)
- Access to electronic library resources
- Online Courses
 - Online discussions
 - Online quizzes
 - Online grade book
 - Online chats
 - Course documents
 - Links to external web sites
- Student Organizations
- Meeting minutes