

Gonzaga University

GOING ATOMIC WITH TECHNOLOGY TUTORIALS

Gonzaga University serves more than 7,700 students from its campus in Spokane, Washington. With each new semester, the school incorporates additional technology to help engage students in their courses and ease the administrative burden on faculty and staff.

Many of the new technologies have been customized to fit the unique needs of the university. But as each technology is customized, the challenge becomes how to accurately train staff, faculty and students on its use. In addition, the technology support staff at Gonzaga was perpetually answering the same questions about items as simple as how to do a mail merge within Microsoft® Word.

"We knew we needed some type of technical video tutorial solution to help alleviate the workload on our IT support staff," said Erik Blackerby, Software Training Manager for Gonzaga University. "The problem we faced was how to deal with tutorials for both customized and mainstream technologies on campus."

In the beginning, the university tried a hybrid approach. Gonzaga purchased a user license with a commercial provider for the more mainstream tutorials. The university then created its own homegrown solution to support the specialized technologies.

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Erik Blackerby
Software Training Manager
Gonzaga University

Atomic Learning™

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This hybrid approach helped, but also created several problems. “The commercial solution only allowed for 100 people to use it at any one time,” said Blackerby. “With thousands of people to support, we were constantly shifting the user license around to try and appease everyone on campus.”

The customized solution was also creating a lot of work for support staff. “We had to create, store and manage all of the tutorials ourselves,” said Blackerby. “For all the workload we eliminated, we added more trying to manage the solution.”

In 2010, Blackerby was introduced to Atomic Learning based on a recommendation from a senior official at the university. “After reviewing its capabilities, it became clear that we could get a lot more for our money with Atomic Learning,” said Blackerby.

Atomic Learning is an online technology-training provider focusing on higher education. Universities can gain annual access to more than 55,000 online tutorials that educate viewers on how to use and apply many different types of technologies used in higher education, including the Blackboard Learn™ platform. Students, faculty and staff can view one specific tutorial, or watch all of the tutorials in a series and gain a certification.

One of the most popular features is the direct linking HTML that allows instructors to embed a link to a specific tutorial right into a lesson plan within the Blackboard Learn instance. When students log-in to their Blackboard Learn account, they see the link provided and can click on it, taking them to the Atomic Learning database. Once logged in, students are then taken right to the tutorial. Many faculty members ask that students view the tutorials before class, saving valuable face-to-face time for actual course work.

“The direct linking feature has been great for Gonzaga,” said Blackerby. “Not only do faculty use it with their students, we also use it in materials to train new faculty and staff during orientation. This saves the support staff a lot of time.”

Atomic Learning has also allowed the university to save time on managing custom tutorials. Gonzaga is still able to create its own tutorials for campus-specific technologies, but now the tutorials are uploaded right into the Atomic Learning database. Once in the database, the tutorials are automatically formatted to ensure they are viewable from anywhere on any system.

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Gonzaga has become proactive in promoting Atomic Learning campus-wide. The IT staff has been doing presentations around campus to educate staff and faculty on the benefits of the solution. The help desk has also been promoting it when people call in for help. “Many times, we can refer them right to the Atomic Learning tutorial that will solve their problem,” said Blackerby. “It’s easy for the help desk to do a quick search and send callers a direct link to the tutorial they need.”

In the near future, Blackerby sees more people viewing tutorials from their mobile devices. “Atomic Learning is already thinking ahead and has recently created a free mobile application for Apple devices,” said Blackerby. “This will create greater flexibility and help drive the continued growth of Atomic Learning throughout the university.”

Overall, the solution has been a big success for Gonzaga. “We have received good feedback from faculty, staff and students alike – they love Atomic Learning,” said Blackerby. “We plan to continue expanding our tutorial library with Atomic Learning as the university adds additional technologies.”

