



Seattle Vocational Institute Depends on SchoolVue to Protect Student Privacy and Facilitate Classroom Instruction Without Straining Resources

Since its inception, Seattle Vocational Institute (SVI), a division of Seattle Central Community College, has provided post-secondary vocational instruction—from allied health to cosmetology and computer networking to pre-apprentice trades—and basic adult education to more than 15,000 individuals. With growing unemployment rates, SVI has seen their enrollment jump as more and more individuals are looking for retraining to better their chances in the job market. “We enroll approximately 1,400 students each year and our average classroom size has grown to almost 30 students—and we have waiting lists,” says Michael Baker, IT Director at SVI (Seattle, Washington).

The school serves the economically challenged and more than 80 percent of their student body is comprised of women and minorities. “Our unique circumstances mean that in any given day a classroom may have 45 ESL (English as Second Language) students in the morning and 45 dental assistant students in the afternoon. Due to our funding issues we don't have teaching assistants for every program and, therefore, our instructors are teaching large classes with little or no help,” Baker explains. In fact, SVI's budget was slashed by 14 percent, leaving the number of faculty and staff intact, but straining their labor resources.

A Robust Solution to Meet Multiple Challenges

Baker and his colleagues evaluated a handful of classroom management solutions with three specific criteria in mind. From a student perspective, the approximately 300 PCs at SVI are state-owned and are shared among students in different programs and, as a result, there is no expectation for privacy. Baker needed a solution that would provide privacy to students who needed more access to instructors but who are also more likely to be self-conscious and reluctant to ask for assistance. Second, from an administrative standpoint, faculty needed a solution that would facilitate classroom management without draining time and resources. Finally, with reduced funding, SVI needed a cost-effective solution to fit their budget.

CrossTec SchoolVue was selected based on its ability to directly address SVI's challenges. “After extensive testing by our tech department and review by our faculty, we were all in agreement that CrossTec SchoolVue was affordable and would be a major contribution to solving the problem of limited instructor time for one-on-one help,” Baker says. “The privacy features in SchoolVue also help overcome the shyness and embarrassment that often accompanies a student needing help.”

How It Works: SchoolVue From a Student, Instructor, and IT Perspective

Students can securely use the Student Toolbar in SchoolVue to confidentially request help from the instructor. The instructor can then respond and communicate privately via an online text chat without interrupting or involving the rest of the classroom. Instructors can also further address privacy and security issues in a shared learning environment with SchoolVue's application and Internet metering features that enable them to control and monitor student access to appropriate PCs, programs, and information relevant to their course of study.

There was a transition period for the students who were enrolled when SchoolVue was first implemented about 18 months ago. "The first group of students who were suddenly exposed to SchoolVue were understandably reluctant at first because they felt as if they were being watched. That quickly disappeared and student acceptance has been part of the program," Baker says.

While the privacy control features were attractive and remain essential, the feature-rich and flexible nature of SchoolVue has also helped SVI and its faculty address changing needs. According to Baker, two specific programs—for medical and dental assistants—have grown and the features in SchoolVue that help manage student resources have become essential. "For example, faculty for these programs often need to share web sites with complex URLs that link to important forms," he explains. The Student Toolbar in SchoolVue, which is fully configurable and easily accessed by instructors, provides a quick and convenient way for students to access resources required for a given lesson—including web links. "SchoolVue makes it easy for them to post these sites and direct students where they need to go."

From an IT standpoint, Baker notes that SchoolVue integrated easily with its Microsoft domain. "While minor glitches are typical of a network solution in a vertical market, we didn't have any real surprises or experience any major technical headaches," he explains. "We also have a great relationship with CrossTec's support people; they are easy to work with and helpful."

The Human Factor

With about half of SVI's faculty using SchoolVue, Baker also needed to address the human factor of introducing new technology. "When you introduce people to new technology it's easy for us [IT] to see how it will help them, but it's not always that easy for them to see it. There are some standard problems when you introduce technology in a school environment. However, while there was an expected learning curve, SchoolVue is easy to use and our faculty caught on very quickly," Baker notes.



“With this type of solution, people will typically grab onto a few features they see right away and might not immediately use 80 percent of what is available. For instance, faculty quickly caught on to the ability to post links. But, as instructors use it more and more, they each find little features that they really like. And while they may be the only person using a specific feature, that’s okay with us—it really speaks to the versatility, flexibility, and value of SchoolVue. What is most important is that they can expand the use of SchoolVue as they need to,” Baker concludes.

A Value-Added Solution for Challenging Times

Academic institutions and educators at all levels need to have tools that will facilitate learning while maximizing over-extended resources in the face of tightening budgets. A robust and flexible solution, such as SchoolVue, delivers on all fronts by providing a cost-effective console that integrates all aspects of classroom management—from maintaining privacy to providing individualized instruction in large classrooms to sharing resources—and delivers ongoing value for educators and their students.