

LEADING RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

# University Backs Up Faculty Computers, Keeping Research Safe

## 250+

Faculty &  
Staff Backed Up

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Manager of College IT Support Services

## 100%

Remote Computer  
Setups

“Backblaze just does its thing. Everything I need is right there in the portal. Installations are a cinch. Restores are seamless. It's almost too easy.”

## 5X

Time  
Saved

## Situation

The College of Humanities at a leading research university in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania used software developed by graduates to back up faculty and staff computers. If issues arose, the College's IT team could troubleshoot directly with the developers. Unfortunately, troubleshooting took time IT didn't always have, and their backups were outgrowing their on-premises capacity.

## Solution

The IT team implemented Backblaze Business Backup in 2015 while running the old software simultaneously to ensure a smooth transition. They made Backblaze Business Backup part of their regular build for new machines and added it to existing machines over time, cutting over completely from their legacy approach once confident all machines were backing up to Backblaze.

## Result

The team's backup management effort was cut by a factor of five once they implemented Backblaze Business Backup. With the time saved, they can focus on balancing the day-to-day workload of a small team while protecting world-class research. Beyond safeguarding data, they also used Backblaze to migrate faculty and staff to new computers while working remotely, enabling effortless upgrades.

A leading research university located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania is known for its world-class, interdisciplinary programs in arts, business, computing, engineering, humanities, policy, and science. The university's College of Humanities represents a varied group of students, faculty, and staff, all united by a common goal: confronting and solving society's most complex problems.

## Protecting Renowned Research With Reliable Backups



Faculty from the College of Humanities at a leading research university in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania work to confront and solve the most complex problems facing society today, from studying the ethics of novel technologies in medicine to advancing artificial intelligence. They take a deeply interdisciplinary approach to doing so, bringing together technology and the humanities. For example, Department of Philosophy professors were recently honored at an artificial intelligence conference for their work on an open-source software used to build visualizations of causal models.

The College of Humanities is home to nine departments as well as cross-discipline research centers, and they're all served by a small but mighty team of six tasked with

handling the IT needs of the College's 250+ faculty and staff. On any given day, the College's IT team might be helping business managers spec and purchase their machines, configuring builds, responding to help desk tickets, and troubleshooting with professors.

The manager of IT support services for the College maintains faculty and staff computer backups—where many of them store not just student papers and grades, but their life's work. When he started in 2001, he inherited a legacy backup system that never completely failed but always demanded attention. As the size of their backups grew, so did their urgency to find a more hands-off solution.

# In-house Backup Solution Creates Too Much Homework

The legacy backup system used by the College was developed by graduates. The relationship was mutually beneficial—the developers got to beta test their software with a friendly audience, and the College's IT team had direct access to the people who wrote the software.

The IT team implemented the system in the late 1990s. It ran on Linux servers with a command-line interface. "We definitely depended on it as our backup system, but we were also working out the kinks," the IT manager said. He would find problems with the software and report back to the developers. For a time, users had to be hardwired into a campus Ethernet connection for the backups to work. If a computer wasn't backing up for a few days, they had to chase that user down to physically plug in their machine. They essentially had to monitor 250+ machines individually to make sure they were backing up.

Initially, the software wrote backups to an LTO tape system, and half of the manager's role was constantly refreshing the tapes when they would fill up. "Back in my day we listened to records and 8-tracks, and we stored data on tapes," he joked. "I was basically the tape monkey." If they needed to restore, he had to find the correct tape from hundreds in storage. If it still didn't work, he had to rely on the developers to code a fix. Eventually, they transitioned to a disk array, but the tape library was still in use.

They wanted a backup solution that they didn't have to babysit. Not only that, but their data sets were quickly outgrowing their on-premises capacity, and they wanted to implement a cloud-based solution. "We were ready to cut the cord with our previous backup software developers. It wasn't a bad breakup, but we were eager for a solution that gave us set-it-and-forget-it backups," the IT manager explained.

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**Manager of College IT Support Services**



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## Backblaze Business Backup Passes With Flying Colors

The College's IT leadership selected Backblaze Business Backup to replace the legacy system for its ease of use and affordability. "We were looking for something more seamless as our support needs changed. Happily for us, we landed on Backblaze," the IT manager said.

He explained that they didn't need to do much testing of the new system beyond familiarizing themselves with the user interface and administrative controls. "We got comfortable with Backblaze very quickly, and knew it was going to be there for us in the way we needed it to be," he noted.

They installed Backblaze on existing machines and made it part of their standard build for new machines. To ensure a smooth transition, they ran both software systems concurrently before cutting ties with their previous provider. When they were confident that every machine under management was backing up to Backblaze, they let the software license for the previous solution lapse.



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Manager of College IT Support Services

## Backblaze Backups Graduate With Honors

“I could have easily spent an entire afternoon troubleshooting the specifics of an individual case with our old solution,” the IT manager said. “That all disappeared with Backblaze. It’s at least two or three times, if not five times less work.” He was quick not to put all the blame for that on their previous solution though, acknowledging that technology has come a long way since he had to juggle tapes.

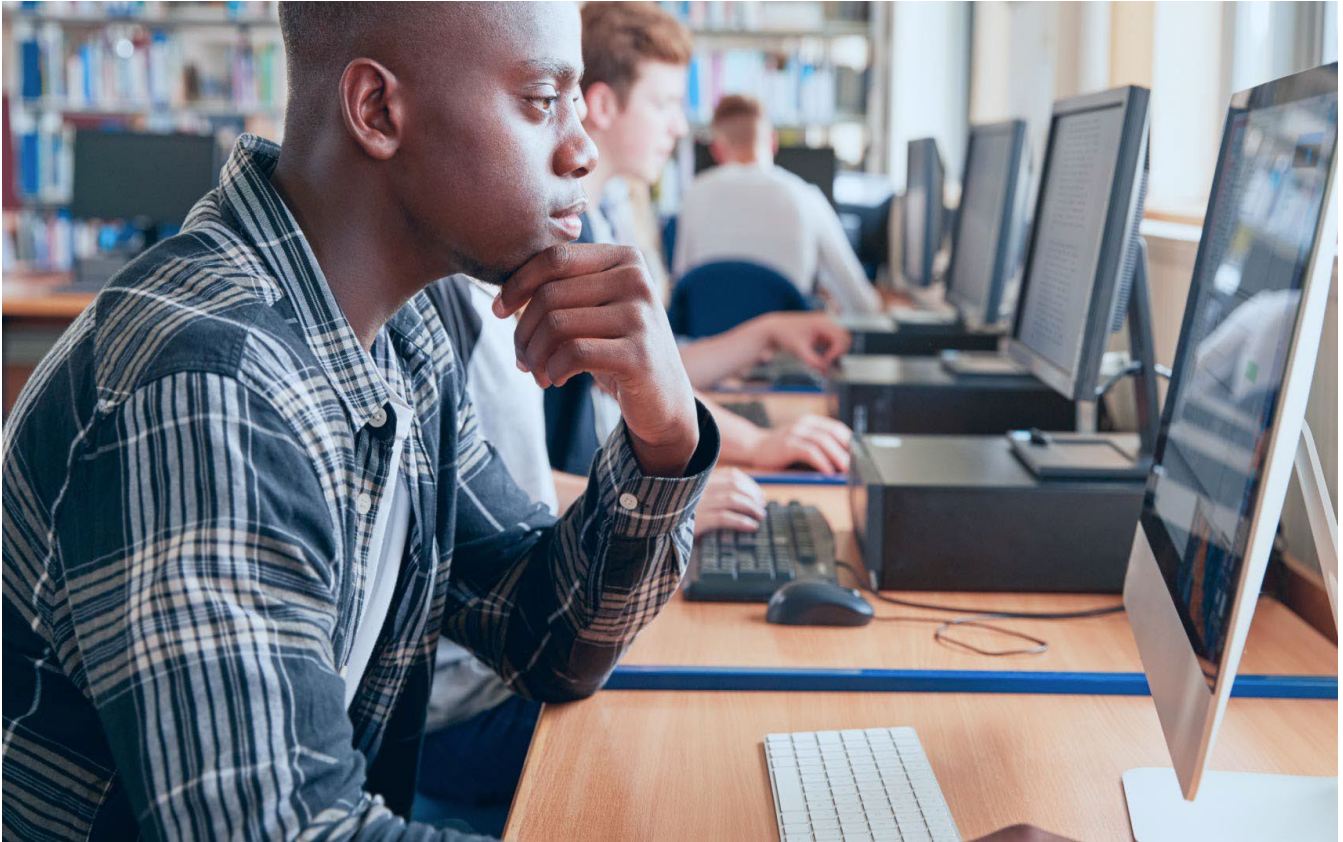
Once Backblaze is installed on a new machine, he no longer worries about it. If he checks the web portal and a machine hasn’t backed up in a few days, he knows it’s not due to a software issue. “Because Backblaze is so reliable, when I see a machine hasn’t

been backed up, that probably means we deactivated it, but I haven’t gotten around to reconciling it on the admin side,” he acknowledged.

Compared to the days of chasing down users to plug in their machines and managing hundreds of tapes, the IT manager noted, “Backblaze just does its thing. Everything I need is right there in the portal. Installations are a cinch. Restores are seamless. It’s almost too easy. I can’t think of a circumstance where it was anything but smooth.” He admits they don’t need their backup software to do anything extraordinary, but that’s all the more reason he appreciates Backblaze’s simplicity. “Backblaze has one job: keep things backed up. And it does what it’s supposed to do while being easy for us to manage and easy on the user end,” he said.

With the time he saves, he is able to be proactive with managing the backup bookkeeping—the College charges the cost of backups back to the individual departments based on how many licenses they need, and managing that accounting is part of his responsibility. It also enables him to help balance the day-to-day workload of a small team and focus on serving their users. Being able to support them is something he takes seriously, going so far as to personally drop off a new battery at a staff person’s home.





## Extra Credit for Migrating Remotely

Beyond keeping faculty and staff computers safely backed up in the cloud, Backblaze allowed the College's IT team to continue to function effectively even during mandatory work from home periods and other remote work scenarios.

Previously, if a user needed to upgrade to a new machine, someone from the IT team would typically sit down with them and manually migrate data from their old machine. Without the ability to meet in person, they leaned on Backblaze to migrate machines remotely. They would mail the user a new laptop and initiate a restore from Backblaze to the new machine. The IT manager said, "It's a testament to Backblaze's ease of use that we were able to migrate remotely. We don't want to put that burden on our users.

Backblaze is there for our disaster recovery, and it's comforting to know we have Backblaze as another tool in the toolbox for migrations as well."

Keeping things simple for the College's users—faculty who represent the top minds in their fields—is a priority for their IT manager, and what he appreciates most about Backblaze. Users can back up a virtually unlimited number of files, and the lightweight client runs unobtrusively in the background searching for new and changed files to back up to the cloud. "They don't want anything in their face," he explained. "They just want to be able to rely on it, and we have relied on Backblaze many times."

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## About Backblaze

**Backblaze's Business Backup** is a truly unlimited backup service to help you protect workstation data for just \$70 per year per computer. Purpose-built by cloud storage experts with over one exabyte of customer data under management and over 50 billion files recovered, the service is easy to deploy across your organization and easier still to manage your team's backups, restores, and billing in one place. With a free 15-day evaluation, you can install Backblaze and begin protecting your business data today.

[www.backblaze.com](https://www.backblaze.com)