You asked: "How to share calendars across machines?"

The solution I'm using is to subscribe to .Mac.

This gives you a service for synchronizing and redistributing your contacts and calendar information if you use multiple sites. It also lets you get at stuff via any web browser.

The mac calendar model is based on publish and subscribe. this is a different model than exchange, where you can view other people's entire calendars willy nilly. Instead, you create multiple classes of calendars on your own machine, and then publish those which you want others to see. As well, you can subscribe to other people's calendars.

So, for example, you might create a calendar called GRAPHICS that has in it all the important dates for GRAPHICS guys (weekly meetings, conference papers, etc). you would own the calendar and publish it, whereupon it would be stored on .Mac (or on a local webdav enabled server if you prefer). your students and friends then subscribe to that calendar.

what you ultimately see in your calendar view is the composition of all of your subscribed and published and local calendars. As in:

The green stuff is my local calendar. The blue stuff is a calendar associated with a project with steve and paul. the red stuff is a calendar associated with Hank. I own and publish the blue to steve and paul and hank, and they subscribe. I can view one, some, or all of my calendars by clicking on the selector in the left hand pane.
I publish my complete calendar which my admin can see via the web as:
By default, ical won't aggregate all of your subscribed calendars into a single one you can publish, but there is a $7 shareware utility called iCalPublish that does. It's quite useful. (http://www.versiontracker.com/php/dlpage.php?id=16952&db=mac&kind=0&link=http://www.buddy.com/ical/files/iCalPublish-v1.2.dmg.bin)

There are literally thousands of calendars out there now, which you could subscribe to if you cared. See, for example:
http://icalshare.com/, for example, subscribing to:

gets you the UW Husky schedule shoved automagically into your calendar.

Apple also maintains a library of calendars at

so subscribing to webcal://ical.mac.com/ical/US32Holidays.ics
gets you all US holidays.

It's pretty convenient and easy to use.

Lastly, in terms of backup, .Mac offers a convenient backup service and interface that lets you say "backup all of my calendars and contacts please."

This stuff just fits in directly with the sync services, so as soon as someone else publishes a new event to a calendar which you subscribe to, it, for example, shows up on your phone if your phone has bluetooth calendar sync, like the Nokia's do. Same thing for syncing with your ipod, and other common docked and wireless devices (http://www.apple.com/isync/devices.html)

I also use my nokia phone as a wireless cellular modem from the road... another story altogether.

Brian