

## **Business Transformation & Operational Excellence Awards**

### **Best Achievement of Operational Excellence in Internet, Education, Media & Technology**

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#### **Executive Summary**

Southern New Hampshire University is dedicated to serving underserved learners for whom college is not a guarantee. SNHU's decision to provide best-in-class learner supports helped drive substantial growth: SNHU saw online enrollment increase from 11,000 to 96,000 learners in just five years. Because of this rapid growth, SNHU needed to locate and implement a learning management system (LMS) that could scale beyond 100,000 students.

SNHU understood that a successful partnership with a new LMS would require moving 150,000 users, migrating course content for 6,000 classes, processing 100,000 records, and integrating many third-party partners. This new LMS would need to be nimble enough to respond to emerging technology needs, but also be robust enough to supply around-the-clock, 24-hour service, and be able to grow with SNHU, even if growth continues past 200,000, or even 300,000 learners.

SNHU chose to partner with D2L and its LMS, Brightspace. Both organizations committed to understanding each other, and worked closely together to identify 20 pain points for SNHU's learners. Improvements included a dashboard function that drives actionable insights into learner progress and needs, flexible mobile formats, competency-based learning options, and improved accessibility through the integration of assistive technologies such as text magnification and speech-to-text. These learner-centered designs allow SNHU to meet its mission as a non-profit university dedicated to educational access (see appendix).

The time invested in building the partnership paid off in an expedited initial rollout of 86 days. SNHU now serves over 130,000 learners on the D2L LMS.

#### **The Strategic Objectives and Scope of the D2L Deployment**

SNHU seeks to serve non-traditional learners. To this end, D2L needed to serve working adults, offer competency-based programs that allow students to complete coursework at their own pace, work seamlessly on multiple mobile platforms, and work internationally to allow us to serve our refugee sites in Africa and the Middle East. It also needed to be able to scale with SNHU as its global learner base grows.

#### **Short-term Strategy 2016-2019:**

- Focus on change management and training by offering substantial upskilling resources, and re-focusing teams on new possibilities.
- Implement governance and steering committees that include a cross section of stakeholders from leadership to team members.
- Implement clear rubrics to drive transparent feedback for learners.
- Implement non-sequential term management.

- Continue to work closely to plan for rolling platform improvements, which are sent to SNHU for 90-day previews. New functionalities are rolled out on a monthly basis with no downtime for students.
- Add functionality for Spanish language, assessment tools, and annotation tools.
- Work together to add workforce-responsive programming in soft skill development.

**Long-term Strategy post-2020:**

- Ensure the SNHU D2L deployment can handle substantial growth of up to and potentially over 300,000 active learners.
- Continue to partner to explore the future of global online education.
- Continue to review and integrate emerging assessment functions that help both learners and faculty improve processes and outcomes.
- Continue to experiment and scale new learning and support models.
- Explore ed-tech opportunities in areas such as artificial intelligence and virtual and extended reality to determine whether these can be integrated to improve learner access and learner experience.

**The Operational Excellence Implementation and Timeline****2016:**

July: D2L and SNHU meet for the first time and continue to talk through the summer.

October: D2L delivers its proposal to SNHU.

**2017:**

January: D2L and SNHU enter a consulting agreement.

June 30: SNHU signs a contract to purchase the Brightspace LMS.

July 6: The implementation race begins.

August: Installation begins; plan to move 17,000 graduate students onto the new LMS.

September 4: A pilot with the full Student Information System is produced for internal review.

October 30: At day 86, 17,000 students and faculty move onto the new LMS as planned.

November: Rollout continues to all graduate students. By the end of November, 2,780 courses, 25,500 users and 72,000 records have been processed.

December: 3,500+ courses are added for the next term. By Christmas, 85,000 users receive access for January 2018 term.

January 2018: Brightspace is fully integrated and operational at SNHU.

**2018 and on:**

Continued upgrades and new functions rolled out every 30 days without interruption improve the learner experience. Key SNHU and D2L stakeholders continue the partnership to explore and test options to anticipate the future of online learning.

**The Size of the Deployment Challenge**

At the time of the deployment, SNHU employed around 8,000 employees, most of whom would be affected by this technology transformation. Also affected were 150,000 users, 6,000 classes, 100,000 records, and dozens of third-party partners which would need to be integrated into the

new LMS. The LMS change reached all learners, whether they are on campus, online, or global, including our partner sites in refugee camps.

### The Impact of the Operational Excellence Deployment

Following the tech upgrade, SNHU students and faculty reacted strongly in favor of the new LMS. SNHU did experience some disruption, but the disruptions were minimal. Implementation resulted in a less than 2 percent negative change in the university's business metrics, which is below typical tech transformation metrics. The first six months of 2018, after the system became nearly fully functional across the SNHU, the number of total logins increased by around 35 percent, which indicated that learners were adapting to the new LMS, and were benefitting from new functions such as fully integrated mobile access.

There was a small slowdown in learner efficiency as they adapted to the new LMS over the first two terms, but not to the point where it affected their grades. This was a critical point for SNHU, as undergraduate terms are 8 weeks (6 terms per year) and graduate terms are 10 weeks (5 terms per year). A loss of even one week of course time due to LMS implementation could have resulted in substantial negative impacts for learners and retention rates.

### The Organizational Results of Operational Excellence Deployment

As a nonprofit, SNHU is not driven by the same goals as a for-profit organization. Because we are driven to make college affordable, we have frozen tuition rates the past 10 years, through 2021. The smooth implementation of an LMS that is able to scale with SNHU's growth helps us keep costs down for our learners. The following graphic illustrates the total cost of an online course-based Bachelor's in Business Administration at similar higher education providers, for reference (rates based on publicly available tuition information as of 10/18/19). We are proud of our ability to serve our mission by keeping tuition flat while nonprofit peers increased tuition by 3.4% on average in 2019-2020 (College Board data).

#### ONLINE TUITION COMPARISON BACHELOR'S DEGREE (BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION OR EQUIVALENT)



### Value Generation

Through 2018 and the first half of 2019, SNHU adopted more new functionalities with D2L than the previous vendor implemented in five years. SNHU and D2L participate in conferences together to disseminate thought leadership into the higher education ecosystem. Through continual conversations, SNHU and D2L surface needs; for small fixes, D2L may implement changes the same day.

**Selection of Awards SNHU has received**

- 2017 21st Century Distance Learning Award for Excellence in Online Technology by The United States Distance Learning Association
- 2017 Digital Learning Innovation Award (DLIAward) - Online Learning Consortium
- 2019 award for Inspiring Programs in STEM that increase access for underrepresented groups from INSIGHT Into Diversity (for online IT programs)
- 2019 Deloitte Digital Innovation award at Dreamforce – Deloitte won for its work at SNHU on digital transformation and exponential growth
- 2019 Association for Continuing Education's (ACHE) Outstanding Services to Underserved Populations award for the creation of the Online Accessibility Center.
- 2019 Effective Practice for Pathways to Math Success - Online Learning Consortium
- 2014-2019 Most Innovative University, five consecutive years, North region, US News & World Report

**SNHU's students, leaders and stakeholders all speak to the needs addressed by this LMS implementation**

"It's a one-stop shop. As soon as you're on [the LMS], you get a visual snapshot of where you are in a course. You can see the feedback from your teacher. Your class schedule is right there. You can access all your services — student support, the library, advising, the online writing center. It just makes it easier to learn because you're not wasting time hunting around for things. It's all right there."— Kristine Ducote, online student.

"With access to the student's rubric we can see if a student is struggling with understanding the content, or if it's an issue with their writing mechanics. With that knowledge, advisors can take the action that is best suited to each student's individual situation. This is the SNHU approach to personalized learning. With data drawn from Brightspace, we can intervene with an at-risk student even before they're aware they're at risk." - Matthew Thornton, Associate Vice President, Student Technology Experience at SNHU.

"We knew we had to do the whole thing and do it fast. While I didn't believe it to be impossible, I now understand just how 'impossible' our accomplishment was."— Gerry Fulbrook, Associate Vice President, Academic Technologies at SNHU.

"D2L and SNHU are mission-aligned — we agree that it's essential to provide learners with a modern and engaging experience that encourage them to reach higher and keep learning."  
- John Baker, CEO of D2L.

"Technology is at the heart of teaching and learning and at the heart of our business as educators. Our mission is to serve students in the best way, so we looked for a best-in-class LMS that could bring our capabilities to the next level. We selected Brightspace as it enables our instructors to address student's unique needs, engage them, and offer a modern, mobile learning experience. With Brightspace, SNHU is on the global playing field, engaging our learners, personalizing learning and using the most innovative teaching models available today."  
- Tom Dionisio, Executive Vice President of Technology and Transformation at SNHU.