



Engaging every learner

How a professor with 2,100 students ensures no one feels like a number

Overview

Each year, 2,100 students enroll in Dr. Jaclyn Broadbent's first-year blended Health Behaviour class. It's a daunting number for any professor—but Dr. Broadbent of Deakin University, Australia, isn't just any professor. Although her students come from four different campuses and represent varying backgrounds and skill sets, she's determined to get through to each and every one.

When Deakin switched to the Brightspace platform, she saw the new tools available as a treasure trove of possibilities to enhance student engagement. Dr. Broadbent's innovative efforts delighted and inspired her learners, resulting in extremely positive student feedback and impressive retention.

For transforming the challenge of teaching 2,100 diverse students into an opportunity to reach every learner, Dr. Broadbent won the 2014 Desire2EXCEL Impact Award.

AT A GLANCE

Client Deakin University

Students 2,100

Level Undergraduate

Solutions Brightspace Online and Blended Learning solution

CHALLENGE

- increase student engagement and influence greater retention
- ensure each student feels connected to peers and faculty
- take diversity of student cohort into account
- ensure every student has an equal opportunity to succeed
- provide the feedback and faculty interaction necessary for student improvement

SOLUTION

- create a unique experience for each learner by sending personalized emails automatically when they meet specific criteria
- increase touchpoints and opportunities for collaboration and interaction
- provide supplementary material at different academic levels to engage more students
- reduce the length of the feedback cycle by providing timely personalized feedback

RESULT¹

- teacher scored 4.72/5 in student evaluations, compared to 3.9/5 university average
- 95% felt "the subject team cared"
- 89% agreed it "motivated them to do well in the next assessment"
- 90% student retention
- winner of six prestigious teaching awards
- nomination for the 2014 Australian Teaching Award, including Australian University Teacher of the Year



Challenge

EACH STUDENT MUST FEEL IMPORTANT

Dr. Broadbent is one of those teachers you never forget. You can tell she's passionate about her subject and that inspires you. But there's more to it—you also feel like she cares.

Her secret? Dr. Broadbent really does care. A large cohort like Health Behaviour only intensifies her need to ensure that no one is left out or left behind. "I want my students to feel a connection," explains Dr. Broadbent, "and the main challenge in connecting is making them feel like they're important."

AN EQUAL CHANCE TO SUCCEED

Getting to know her students was complicated by their diversity. While most were in their first year, they came from 43 different degree programs, displaying a wide range of academic skills, interests, and pre-existing knowledge.

With so many students starting from different places, Dr. Broadbent was concerned with equalizing education. "Everyone deserves the same chance to succeed," she says. "That means providing an enriching, stimulating, and personalized learning experience to each student, despite their vast differences."

TIMELY FEEDBACK WAS LACKING

Providing timely, quality feedback heavily influences student engagement and outcomes, yet the sheer number of students was preventing Dr. Broadbent from reaching them individually when it mattered most.

"In our students' exit surveys we were consistently getting comments about how frustrated they were with the lack of timely feedback," she explains. "And I understand that. How do we expect them to make progress when we don't tell them how they're doing gradually and meaningfully throughout the subject?"

When Deakin switched to the Brightspace platform, Dr. Broadbent saw opportunities for change: "I was so excited about all of the little things I could do and how I might enhance education."



STUDENTS FEEL ACKNOWLEDGED AND VALUED

It's easy to feel disconnected when you're one amongst hundreds of students. To meet the issue head on, Dr. Broadbent enables the Intelligent Agents tool, an automated functionality in the Brightspace platform that uses event triggers to help teachers scale personalization. "If students don't log onto the platform for two weeks they receive an email," she says. "It's just-in-time attention that aims to give them a connection with the School of Psychology. Each email is personalized and comes from me, and it's all automated so I don't have to monitor students or manually send emails to 500 students."

Grade time is a key moment in a student-teacher relationship. With the help of the Intelligent Agents tool, Dr. Broadbent also maximizes opportunities for support and motivation. Struggling students receive an email outlining what they can do to improve next time. High achievers get congratulations and those who are improving receive encouragement to keep going.

"Sometimes students just need someone to notice," she says. "It's so rewarding for me when I have been able to target someone possibly 'at risk' of dropping out early in the semester, and then reading their assessments pieces at the end when they've come so far."

MANY PATHS TO SUCCESS

To Dr. Broadbent's way of thinking, it takes ample communication in various forms and at different levels to keep her diverse group of learners marching forward.

"I use the Newsfeed tool weekly to provide frequent reminders on how to keep on track, and an overall road

map for success. Embedded links to resources stimulate curiosity and inspire students to engage with the activities. And for a personal touch, I provide a YouTube™ talking head in the Newsfeed tool."

Dr. Broadbent maximizes social media to reach learners where they live. A Twitter widget allows her to post current health issues so students can stay on top of the field and have meaningful discussions. Reminders and links are automatically posted on a subject Facebook group as well as on the Brightspace implementation's home page.

MEANINGFUL FEEDBACK WHEN IT'S NEEDED

Perhaps the most impressive of her innovations is the creation of the Model Demonstrate, a method of feedback supported by Brightspace platform tools. "My goal with Demonstrate is to increase the level of feedback students receive and improve their critical thinking," she says.

Now students receive feedback two weeks after submitting an assignment and at least a week before their next assignment is due. Individual assignments submitted through Brightspace ePortfolio Presentations receive audio-video feedback using the Brightspace platform audio and video messaging tools in order to draw out each student's best possible performance on subsequent assessments.

According to Dr. Broadbent, it's having the desired effect: "I absolutely love the audio-video tool for personalizing the experience. Some of the feedback about it from students is mind-blowing. They say it feels like someone is there talking to them about their assignment instead of scribbling notes all over their work and it makes them want to try harder."



“I appreciate how collaborative D2L is—they’re so responsive to my needs. We work in a continual process of revision on the Brightspace platform, always thinking about what’s working, what could be improved, and what additional tools are necessary. It’s refreshing to have a technology partner that’s driving innovation forward, tailoring education to the needs of students and teachers alike.”

Dr. Jaclyn Broadbent, Lecturer in Health Psychology, Deakin University



DRAMATIC EVIDENCE OF FORGING CONNECTIONS

Despite the enormous class size, students love their Health Behaviour class—a fact that’s reflected in their professor evaluations. Amazingly, students score Dr. Broadbent at 4.72/5 compared to the university average of 3.9/5.²

Dr. Broadbent believes the positive response comes down to the connections she’s making. In evaluations, 95% of students felt “the subject team cared” and 89% agreed that it “motivated them to do well in the next assessment.”³

HIGH RATE OF RETENTION

The best measure of Dr. Broadbent’s success is not the awards she’s won—although there have been plenty—but rather the impact she’s having on her students. One of the best measures of that is retention. Since being on the Brightspace platform, retention rates sit at an impressive 90%.⁴

Dr. Broadbent’s take on why students stick with her class? “Based on student feedback, I think it’s the use of the Intelligent Agents tool to follow student progress, personalized learning and providing extra support, but connecting our newsfeed on a Facebook group helps too.”

WELL-DESERVED ACCOLADES

It didn’t take long for Deakin to realize that Dr. Broadbent’s methods would be of value to other larger classes. Now she regularly consults with staff and holds workshops so professors may better utilize the features of the Brightspace platform.

Dr. Broadbent has won six prestigious awards in recognition of her contribution to innovation in teaching and is widely acknowledged as a leader in Brightspace best practices. Some of Dr. Broadbent’s awards and accomplishments include:⁵

- Winner of the 2012 Citation Award from the Australian government for her outstanding contribution to student learning
- Nominated for the 2014 Australian Teaching Award, including Australian University Teacher of the Year
- Use of Brightspace tools in the Model Demonstrate has been used as the basis of an application for a National Teaching Grant
- Presented the Model Demonstrate at a 2013 Teaching and Learning conference in Vancouver, Canada
- Recipient of \$5,000 research funding to look at Intelligent Agents in student learning and their effect on retention

² Results and statistics provided by Deakin University

³ Results and statistics provided by Deakin University

⁴ Results and statistics provided by Deakin University

⁵ Results, statistics and awards information provided by Deakin University

About D2L

D2L is the software leader that makes the learning experience better. The company's cloud-based platform—Brightspace—is not a common one-size-fits-all learning management system (LMS). It's easier to use, more flexible, and smart. With Brightspace, you can personalize the experience for every learner to deliver real results. The company is also a world leader in learning analytics: its platform predicts learner performance so that you can take action in real time to keep them on track. Brightspace is used by learners in higher education, K-12, and the enterprise sector, including the Fortune 1000. D2L has operations in the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, Brazil, and Singapore. | www.brightspace.com

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