**brightspace**™
by D2L

# A Learning Renaissance

*Lakeland College helps students take charge of their education online while dramatically rebuilding declining enrolment numbers*

# Overview

Lakeland College students have the opportunity to take charge and participate in shaping their own education at the college. How? Through career-relevant, student-run projects, operations and events. Programming areas include university transfer, agricultural sciences, business, energy, environmental sciences, fire and emergency services, health and wellness, human services, interior design technology, and trades and technology.

The college's students are drawn to Lakeland's unique, hands-on education approach. Students have the opportunity to leverage a variety of instructional methods from face-to-face, blended, and distance learning to realize their educational goals, become career-ready, or enhance their professional skill set for career advancement.

**AT A GLANCE**

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| **Client** | Lakeland College |
| **Students** | Serves about 7,500 students annually |
| **Faculty** | 174 full & part-time |
| **Level** | Post-Secondary |
| **Solution** | Brightspace Online and Blended Learning solution |
| **Services** | Brightspace Creative Services |

**CHALLENGE**

- Breathe new life into human services education programs experiencing declining enrolment

**SOLUTION**

- Use online learning to extend the program's reach and open up access to non-traditional learners
- Use simulation to recreate real-life practicum experience and boost engagement for online students

**RESULT[1]**

- Program is thriving with enrolment doubling year over year–no longer at risk
- Online registrations up from four students in the 2011-2012 academic year to 450+ today

# Challenge

## DECLINING ENROLMENT MAKES
## FOR AN UNSUSTAINABLE SITUATION

The School of Human Services at Lakeland helps provide students with the skills to build relationships and promote healthy lifestyles with children, youth and adults. The school offers a variety of certificates and programs, including both a certificate and diploma program in Early Learning and Child Care; a diploma in Child and Youth Care; a diploma in Sign Language Interpretation; an Educational Assistant certificate; a post-credential certificate for mental health practitioners; and a certificate in American Sign Language and Deaf Culture Studies.

Lakeland is also the only college in Alberta to offer the Early Learning and Child Care and Educational Assistant certificates in the French language.

Back in 2011, face-to-face enrolment numbers were declining for the School of Human Services, due in large part to the school's rural location. As a result, the school was experiencing serious budget concerns. "It was an unsustainable situation," admits Joanne McDonald, School of Human Services Chair. "With only 20-25 students in the face-to-face certificate program for Early Learning and Child Care and 5-10 in the diploma program, we were at risk."

At the same time, Lakeland was struggling with its existing learning management system (LMS) provider to translate the college's authentic learning philosophy into an online learning format.

"We needed a partner and a system that could help us move our programs and philosophy to an online format," says McDonald. "This would allow us to open up to more non-traditional students, extend our reach beyond the town of Vermilion and directly face down the enrolment challenges we were experiencing."

# Solution

As McDonald and her faculty began to frame out their requirements for online learning, a technology committee was established to look at online learning from a college-wide perspective. Lakeland had been using an LMS previously, but college administration was exploring other options for next generation learning management.

The technical committee brought forward the Brightspace platform as a top replacement candidate, attracted by the platform's interactivity, style sheets, and user-friendly interface. "Our students are not terribly tech-savvy," explains Kelly Mazerolle, an instructor in the Early Learning and Child Care program. "The online learning system needed to be really easy and intuitive for them to use."

Brightspace's ability to support French-language learning was another point in the LMS's favour, as it would also allow the Human Services School to deliver its French programs to a broader audience of students online.

## SIMULATIONS HELP STUDENTS EXPERIENCE REAL–LIFE SCENARIOS ONLINE

In the face-to-face Early Learning and Child Care diploma program, students at Lakeland spend 11 weeks in class studying theory, followed by 4 weeks in practicum. As part of the practicum, students run a play program for children. They are tasked with transforming two college classrooms into suitable child care settings–one for infant/toddlers and the other for pre-school aged children. Members of the community drop their children off to participate in sessions.

One of the challenges Lakeland faced in moving their early learning certificate and diploma programs online was to duplicate this practicum experience for distance learning students who never set foot on campus. "We needed to find a way to mirror the experience of setting up a classroom and interacting with children and parents virtually so our online students could have that important practicum experience," explains McDonald. In discussions with D2L, it was determined that a simulated experience delivered through Brightspace was the way to go.

To build the online simulation, McDonald and Mazerolle sat down with the Brightspace Creative Services team to help them translate the real-life world of early childhood education into an engaging, interactive online learning experience. Students online would be presented with the same kinds of challenges and situations they would face in a real life day-care setting. The team met weekly with D2L to refine the simulation and make it as realistic as possible–right down to addressing diversity in the staff, parents, and children. "We even asked if they could create us a tall, dark and handsome caregiver," chuckles Mazerolle.

## Solution continued

McDonald and Mazerolle walked the D2L team through the real-life steps students take so they could be mirrored online. Students have to check out rooms to see if they are appropriate and safe. They have to go on a shopping trip to select toys.

They have to prepare a budget, plan menus and set up a parent handbook. Then, the kids arrive. "This is where the simulation really takes over," says McDonald. "It puts our online students into real life situations–for instance, a parent arrives with a sick child, or forgets the diaper bag–and they have to make decisions. If they make the wrong decision, then there's the possibility their day care gets shut down by the authorities."

### BLOWN AWAY BY STUDENT ENGAGEMENT
The Brightspace platform also offers students collaboration tools and discussion forums where they can connect with each other to share their knowledge and experiences. "When we first launched the simulation, I did a run through with the pilot group of 20 students to see how well they were engaging," says McDonald. "After the first day and 150 posts later, I was blown away. The response was overwhelming."

### PARCEL–SIZED LEARNING HELPS NON–TRADITIONAL STUDENTS THRIVE
With the majority of students entering the Human Services online programming coming from non-traditional backgrounds, it was critical that Brightspace offer parcel-sized learning to not overwhelm a student who is juggling learning with family and work commitments. "We actually deliberately slow down their learning," says Mazerolle.  Over the 11 weeks they are "in school," students are led through the online course content a little bit at a time, supported and prompted by Brightspace through friendly reminders. Students are encouraged to use the Dropbox tool to submit videos and photos of their interactions with children to show instructors how they are applying their knowledge in their jobs.

# Result

## ENGAGING AND RETAINING STUDENTS

Given Lakeland's family-like atmosphere and emphasis on close personal connections between instructors and students, McDonald, Mazerolle and the rest of the faculty initially wondered how moving to an online teaching model might impact their ability to create lasting relationships with students. In short, it hasn't. "I was always a bit worried about how I would build rapport with students I didn't see face-to-face," says McDonald. "But we've found we know them just as well as students we see in the traditional classroom.

We know who they are, what they struggle with and what they are great at. We have found, for many of our non-traditional students, learning online has actually helped build their confidence. They are able to fit their learning goals in amongst all the other things they have on their plate." The numbers certainly show students are thriving online. The Human Services School recently reported a 94% retention rate among students participating in online classes for the most recent fall semester.[2]

Lakeland piloted four online human services courses in 2011-2012 and four students enrolled. Since then, online registration for human services programs has increased exponentially. In the fall 2014 term, registrations totalled 311. Registrations are now nearly 450 and doubling year over year, with the program now pulling in students from across Canada. There were 109 graduates from Human Services programs during 2015.[3]

McDonald notes that support from D2L was critical to the school's venture into online learning. D2L's expertise and creative support were instrumental in helping Lakeland pilot and try new ways of doing things and opened them up to the creativity available to them online. "Brightspace has actually renewed the faculty's energy because we suddenly have all this massively creative theatre in which to work. And it is really neat to see the affect we are having on our students and their lives. Online learning has allowed many to pursue a post-secondary education they didn't think was possible before. And that ultimately will translate into better care for children."

## WHAT STUDENTS ARE SAYING

"Lakeland is truly what I wanted and needed from a distance program. I felt that I could contribute my own ideas and the instructors helped to guide my thoughts and encouraged their development. I feel that Lakeland actually wanted students to challenge themselves and engage others in their field and make them understand why they believe in their theories of childcare. The program is the epitome of distance education."

"I have been challenged, frustrated, elated, and confused. I have found help in my instructors, my classmates and even Google and Pinterest. My instructors have been there every step of the way, always giving constructive feedback, and ready to answer any question I might have. My classmates have been there through discussion boards and emails, always giving new ideas and thoughts to consider."

# 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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