



Portland Community College

*Going beyond compliance to emphasize accessibility
in the learning experience*

Overview

Serving more than 1.3 million college-age residents across five counties, Portland Community College (PCC) is Oregon's largest multi-campus higher education institution. It is divided into three, soon to be four, comprehensive campuses, seven centers, and dozens of independent locations throughout the community.

In recent years, student enrollment in PCC's online courses soared one hundred and thirty percent. As of the fall 2012 term, over a third of the institution's students were taking at least one online course.

AT A GLANCE

Client	Portland Community College
Students	Approx. 94,000
Level	Higher Education
Solutions	Online and Blended Learning Solution

CHALLENGE

- Provide affordable, quality education in an environment that is accessible to the many students located around the world

SOLUTION

- Implemented Brightspace in order to foster a more accessible and reliable learning experience for students and staff

RESULT¹

- Standardized HTML templates help support and enable Portland Community College's accessibility criteria
- Enrollment in distance learning courses has continued to grow steadily since the adoption of Brightspace
- The Brightspace platform creates flexibility for instructors to adapt to their student's needs



Challenge

ENSURING ACCESSIBILITY WITHIN TECHNICAL LIMITATIONS

At Portland Community College, accessibility means more than just satisfying a legal requirement: it's a core focus. PCC strives to provide affordable, quality education in an atmosphere that is highly accessible for all learners. While federal laws require that learning institutions provide equitable access to educational opportunities, PCC aims to take their standards for implementation to the next level.

The college is currently striving to ensure all of its online courses are fully accessible. The Distance Education department offers trainings on accessible document creation, video captioning, and is reviewing new and revised courses before they go live.

Given the number of courses that the college offers and the limited funding, the college needs their applications to be accessible as well as support the creation of accessible content. Upon deciding to make a change due to frustrations with their previous learning management system vendor, the college knew any new solution would need to position them for future success with accessibility efforts.

They were also dealing with a large number of online courses, limited funding and the varied demands to support student success. Having a learning platform that is accessible, would allow them to focus more time on the accessibility of the course content.

GOING BEYOND SIMPLE COMPLIANCE

Portland Community College needed a learning platform capable of fostering greater student engagement, allowing for different assessment types, and offering easier ways for instructors to create accessible content. In evaluating its prior accessibility practices, the college concluded the old program lacked clarity, coordination, and established standards.

“I was thrilled to plug into D2L’s Accessibility group and learn more about their accessibility spirit. I could talk with other users of Brightspace and speak with the people implementing accessibility at D2L. They are active and responsive. If I ever email any questions or a suggestion for a topic, I get a response right away.”

Karen Sorensen, Accessibility Advocate for Online Courses Portland Community College



“What really matters is that the company you are partnering with is going in the same direction that you are. D2L deserves full credit for its commitment to accessibility. They are excited about what they do, and we are eager to make accessibility pervasive.”

Andy Freed, Manager of Technology & Support, Portland Community College



SEEKING ACCESSIBILITY-FOCUSED STANDARDS

To support their approach to improving accessibility, the school would require an equally comprehensive online learning solution. After considering their internal needs and evaluating multiple offerings available in the marketplace, they conducted pilot programs on several alternative solutions and even interviewed other institutions using those platforms on a similar scale.

In D2L, they recognized an organization that was a long-time accessibility leader, having formed its own Accessibility Interest Group in 2006 and fostered close working partnerships between end users and the company's creative, usability, IT, and Disability Services teams. In D2L's technology, they recognized an opportunity to surpass basic legal compliance and truly enhance the accessibility of the learning experience.

KEY BENEFITS

- Reliability due to accessibility being a preemptive focus
- Built-in accessible authoring aids, such as accessibility-focused templates and MathML support
- Scalable and flexible delivery models reflect the needs of individual learners
- Long term partnership working to develop new benchmarks for accessibility success



A TRUE PARTNER IN MAKING EDUCATION AVAILABLE TO EVERY LEARNER

The college's efforts to emphasize accessibility have been bolstered due to the inherent accessibility of the Brightspace platform itself. Their instructors' incentive to deliver accessible course content was also enhanced with a Brightspace solution.

Further driving the adoption was the reliability gained from knowing any new versions of the platform would be designed with accessibility as a preemptive focus.

Standardized HTML templates supporting and enabling accessibility criteria and practices, respectively, reduce the possibility that new content will not meet accessibility requirements. The HTML editor in the Brightspace Learning Environment is designed with accessible content creation in mind: it prompts users for alt text when they add images, includes built-in color contrast checking, allows for the incorporation of content directly from word processors without requiring an external editor, and uses semantic styles by default.

The platform also dramatically reduces the complexity of authoring accessible mathematical equations, through MathML. With the flexibility to adapt to individual needs, the Brightspace platform enables instructors to make time accommodations (for example, on an individual learner's quiz) directly within the assessment, rather than having to create multiple versions.

In addition to minimizing problems with students being timed out of evaluations, the ability to combine personalization with accessibility best practices may have contributed to a reduction in Portland's LMS-related support requests.

Enrollment in Portland Community College's distance learning courses has seen steady growth since implementation. Going forward, their technological foundation allows for the targeting of more stringent accessibility benchmarks—for example, WCAG 2.0 AA, which is a highly-regarded, international standard set by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C).

By partnering with D2L, PCC has been able to establish an approach that is powering the learning experience far beyond the minimum standards of legal compliance and positioning the school for continued success in their efforts to make education truly accessible for every student.

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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