



Why SNHU chose Brightspace as their LMS

SNHU's growth plans to address the needs of the "new traditional" learner

SNHU's mission is focused on student success and they needed an LMS that could accommodate the "new traditional" learner. Their education system is comprised of many different colleges with different operating models. In other words, they're a whale of a university and poised to grow even larger over the coming decade. They chose Brightspace because it is flexible and scalable enough for the next 10 years.

AT A GLANCE

Student Number: 90,000+

Interviewees:

- Gerry Fulbrook, AVP of Academic Technologies (ITS), SNHU



“We are using data every single day!”

Gerry Fulbrook, AVP of Academic Technologies (ITS), SNHU

SUMMARY

Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) is at the forefront of online learning. In fact, they have been named the #1 Most Innovative University in the north, three years running. While they support more than 3,000 on-campus students, they also have over 80,000 online students. To manage the current and anticipated growth, it became clear that SNHU needed to upgrade their LMS. Their existing legacy product simply wasn't flexible enough, nor able to grow at the pace that SNHU required.

QUICK FACTS

- 12,000 students in their online graduate program
- Needed extremely quick implementation and migration
- Needed integration with Student Information System
- Cost-to-degree: Around \$6K
- Competency-based Education (CBE) Program

WHY SNHU CHOSE BRIGHTSPACE AS THEIR LMS

When Gerry Fulbrook, AVP of Academic Technologies (ITS) at SNHU, was brought on-board, it was as part of the long-term intention to change IT from a hassle to an asset. By managing 14 teams with 8 project managers, she successfully navigated the significant lift that was required by the organization to do an accelerated implementation of the Brightspace Learning Environment. The key request for SNHU was the fact that Brightspace is cloud-hosted, which would have an immediate impact on the amount of work their IT department was currently handling.

“Being in the cloud is important. IT needs to get out of the business of hosting.”

Gerry Fulbrook, AVP of Academic Technologies (ITS), SNHU



But this wasn't the whole story of why SNHU decided upon Brightspace. Because SNHU's mission is focused on student success: to make quality, affordable and flexible learning accessible to a geographically dispersed student population, they needed an LMS that could accommodate the “new traditional” learner. This learner may not have previously seen education as an option due to time and cost constraints, among other issues that can be solved with the online education provided by SNHU and enabled by their LMS.



ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF THE “NEW TRADITIONAL” LEARNER

SNHU boasts nearly 90,000 full-time equivalent students. Their education system is comprised of many different colleges with different operating models. In other words, they're a whale of a university and poised to grow even larger over the coming decade. “Brightspace is configurable for today,” explains Gerry. “But at the same time, it is flexible and scalable enough for the next 10 years.”

And this isn't growing enrolments among your typical university student. SNHU is building a business that addresses the “new traditional” learner, one who benefits from the personalized learning that SNHU provides. Because of the growth in the non-traditional learning market, SNHU is preparing for the rise in enrolment of new students, international students, returning students, military students, those looking to upgrade skills while still working, or caring for a family. Gerry describes the needs of these new learners as “often being working adults, with families, who might not be comfortable with college. They may not be fully computer literate, and almost all of them have financial pressures.” But SNHU is banking on the growth of this industry and is seeing enrolment increase along their projected lines.

“Many vendors can't handle the number of enrolments that SNHU is taking on. And it's going to grow.”

Gerry Fulbrook, AVP of Academic Technologies (ITS), SNHU



HAVING A GREAT MOBILE EXPERIENCE WITH THEIR LMS

A key differentiator for selecting Brightspace was the fact that the LMS has responsive design, which means that content is accessible, attractive, and engaging on any device. Along with a Learning Object Repository, a drag-and-drop interface, courses can be built with ease. Students now have the option to work on courses, quizzes, assignments, access instructor feedback, via a mobile web browser. This perfectly suits the “new traditional” learner who needs to study where and when they can find the time. Rather than a standalone app, that may be lacking in functionality and usability, an LMS with responsive design means that the full power and offering of the desktop LMS is the same on mobile devices. Students need only go to one spot to access and interact with the entire course.



“We went from nothing to everything in record time.
We wouldn’t have succeeded without D2L.”

Gerry Fulbrook, AVP of Academic Technologies (ITS), SNHU

HIGHER EDUCATION LMS FEATURES THAT IMPACT STUDENT SUCCESS

Instructors and advisors were extremely interested in having outcomes, competencies, and rubrics all flowing into the grade book. This means that advisors can tell exactly where a student may be struggling — is it in the content of their writing, or the writing itself? This data allows advisors to connect students to exactly the right resources, or to reach out at exactly the right time. For example, with an online writing or math tutor.

By aggregating and reporting on data from the LMS, their Student Information System, and CRM system, their analytics team is able to provide tactical operational reports for instructors and advising staff. With this data, all stakeholders can take immediate action to address a student who may be at risk. For example, if a student appears to be maxing out their credit limit, the school can have a financial advisor reach out to help them better manage their finances. Gerry explains that this holistic and individual approach to each student’s progress is something SNHU takes pride in. “Student success is more than simply completing the degree, or advancing their career. It also means graduating without a crippling financial burden.”

Any student with financial aid (grants, work benefits) is required to have a certain amount of participation in the program during the first 1-2 weeks. This information needs to be reported to federal/state/university financial aid as all funding entities require some tracking and monitoring of students. Should a student be in peril of losing their funding, early intervention can help resolve this issue before it becomes a major issue and ensure the student remains eligible for their financial aid.

DATA TO MAINTAIN ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Data is also important when supporting their faculty. With thousands of adjunct faculty on staff, they need a reliable way to collect data about instructors, feedback and grading to be sure that each is maintaining a high level of academic integrity. Their Faculty Success Portal examines data to ensure grading is done on time, for example. Leaders and managers can ensure the quality of grading by examining data that has been red-flagged by the system for a follow up. This is vital for new instructors, who may need some adjustment time to get up to speed on the SNHU system. More support might be needed to provide instructors with resources that can help them to do their best work.



To monitor student progress, SNHU uses data collected in Brightspace such as: grades, number of submissions, grade on first submission, number of incidents or calls required of each student, number of calls to the help center, etc. They then compare the current term and to previous terms in the year, but also the same term from a year before. This helps them to compare student success metrics to determine if something needs to be done to improve results. “We’re happy to report that data revealed that student success definitely went up,” explains Gerry.

AN ACCELERATED IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

SNHU managed to go from project kickoff to instructor access in less than 4 months. This was in part due to the diligent efforts of Gerry’s teams working closely with D2L implementation and change management experts. The D2L Consulting team, Technical Account Manager, Product Development Team, Creative Services Team, to name a few, were on hand to help enable course design sessions and monitor performance and issues before and after go live. Extensive training was done both onsite as well as remotely, to advise and consult with SNHU through the entire process, which was essential to getting the project done on time. As Gerry describes it, “if you don’t have a partnership with the vendor, you don’t succeed with the implementation.”

FUTURE THINKING AT SNHU

With Brightspace as their core system, SNHU is looking ahead with anticipation. For example, the Nursing Program is interested in adding Augmented Reality into its course offerings. At the same time, the other groups are exploring Virtual Reality. SNHU is also looking to establish a program that would be very attractive to high tech companies. A Competency-based education approach will allow companies (who value micro-credentials over a degree) to be able to verify or evaluate competencies in an employee to determine the actual skills they possess. The process would fast-track employees for career advancement, but also provide companies a quicker way to fill the positions they require.

D2L is extremely excited to take this journey with SNHU. We look forward to being able to provide the technology and services they require to achieve student success, and grow their business.

“D2L is an education partner that is willing to help develop the tools SNHU needs now, and for the future.”

Gerry Fulbrook, AVP of Academic Technologies (ITS), SNHU

