Temple College: Adapting to meet student needs

Temple College makes education accessible to all

In the increasingly competitive job market, employers are placing a greater emphasis on education. Students from less-fortunate backgrounds often lack access to the courses that will help them gain marketable skills—but Temple College aims to provide equal opportunities to anyone who is willing to learn. With D2L’s Brightspace platform, the college has been able to double enrollment within four years by developing engaging, accessible and user-friendly online learning resources.
SUMMARY
Education is vital in today’s job market, but many people simply don’t have the means or opportunity to study for a traditional college degree. To support learners from all backgrounds, Temple College uses D2L’s Brightspace platform to provide accessible online and blended courses.

quick facts

• Increased enrollment from 3,000 to 5,800 within four years
• Expanded the portfolio of online course sections from 200 to over 750
• 95 percent of courses are now either fully online or web-enhanced
• Increased the percentage of students who complete their courses
• Boosted student engagement and retention rates

GIVING EVERYONE A CHANCE TO LEARN
Located about an hour outside of Austin, Texas, Temple College’s local area is home to around 90,000 people. The college aims to enable as many local students as possible to achieve their goals, but a traditional full-time, on-campus education isn’t a good fit for every learner.

Brian St. Amour, Director of eLearning at Temple College, explains: “Many of our students are from non-traditional backgrounds and have life factors, so they might lack the ability to travel to campus every day, or need to fit their studies in around their other jobs and responsibilities. We also have a large number of students who are veterans, so their needs may be different compared to a student who enrolls straight from high school. Temple College is a member of the Achieving the Dream initiative, and we’ve made it our mission to give everyone a fair chance to learn regardless of their life circumstances.”

DRIVING ONLINE ENGAGEMENT
Temple College realized that an online learning platform could help it make its online courses more accessible to a wider variety of students. However, online courses don’t necessarily solve the problem on their own. Many students may lack experience with computers, and some may have never had the experience of writing and turning in a high-level paper.

St. Amour continues: “We wanted a way to make our learning experience accessible for anyone, regardless of their experience, location or income, so we needed a more flexible solution than simply moving more of our courses online.”

“Brightspace enables better communication between faculty and students. We have begun to use it to store information that students may need to access off-campus, so they can log in from home and access important documents. We also have told students that our communication with them will be entirely through email on D2L’s Brightspace platform, which ensures that it is secure.”

Tracey Cooper, Executive Director, Dell Martin Nursing Education Center, Temple College
As a further challenge, the State of Texas’ 60x30 initiative has set a goal of educating 60 percent of the state’s population between the ages of 25 and 34 to degree level by 2030. To achieve that goal, it will be important to ensure that students who start courses get all the support they need to finish and graduate successfully.

“Retention rates are key to the success of the initiative, and retention is a complex issue. To keep students engaged, we need to ensure that our courses focus on marketable skills that employers value, as well as finding ways to reduce the cost of education to minimize student debt. These concerns all feed into our thinking around how we build our online courses.”

Brian St. Amour, Division Director, eLearning, Temple College

COVERING ALL THE BASES
Temple College looked for a flexible platform that would be accessible to the widest possible range of students, and would help to maximize student engagement and retention. After careful consideration, the college decided to implement D2L’s Brightspace platform.

“The reliability and uptime of Brightspace was a big selling point for us,” says St. Amour. “If we are going to have more students logging and using our learning resources we wanted to know we wouldn’t run into problems. The Brightspace platform has been solid from day one, and the longer we’ve been using it, the better the service has become. We use D2L’s hosting and we’re excited about the recent migration to Amazon Web Services, which should be an even better fit for our environment.”

The college also saw the platform’s support for integration with educational publishers as a major advantage.

“Publisher integrations have increased by 300 percent over the past three years,” says St. Amour. “That makes it easier for students to access high-quality textbooks and other materials online, so they have all the information they need in one place.”

DRIVING PERSONALIZED LEARNING
Brightspace has also had a big impact on Temple College’s ability to deliver personalized learning across its online courses.

“Our students love the Discussions feature in Brightspace—it creates a real sense of community,” says St. Amour. “Although the discussions are asynchronous, having someone answer your queries or suggestions helps students feel like they’re not alone in their studies, even if they are learning remotely from their home.”
“Working with D2L, we’ve almost doubled our enrollment numbers, which suggests that the Brightspace platform has helped us give more people access to a level of education that might have been unattainable before.”
_Brian St. Amour, Division Director, eLearning, Temple College_

To make the platform intuitive for students who are new to online learning, Temple College is using the Daylight user interface. Daylight provides a simple and easy-to-navigate user experience that is suited to mobile and tablet use, boosting accessibility regardless of what device each student prefers to use.

“We had an excellent experience adding Daylight to our platform. We worked with D2L Creative Services to design the user experience, and we formed a very close relationship with the team. It really does feel like more than a vendor/customer relationship—we’ve developed a long-term partnership over the years.”
_Brian St. Amour, Division Director, eLearning, Temple College_

**BOOSTING PARTICIPATION**
With D2L’s Brightspace platform in place, Temple College has been able to build a state-of-the-art online learning management system that helps it provide greater educational opportunities for all. Since the initial implementation, Temple College has seen enrollments for blended and online courses expand from 3,000 to 5,800, and has expanded its online course portfolio from 200 to 750 course sections. 95 percent of its courses are now either fully available online, or have been enhanced with online material.

St. Amour explains: “Working with D2L, we’ve almost doubled our enrollment numbers, which suggests that the Brightspace platform has helped us give more people access to a level of education that might have been unattainable before.”

“The majority of the boost in student numbers is due to the growing popularity of our online courses. We’ve worked hard to make them as accessible as possible—we run eLearning workshops for students each semester, covering everything from computer literacy to extra tutoring. The simplicity of the Brightspace interface means that students don’t take long to pick it up. And the mobile access makes courses accessible to even the busiest learners, so people can fit their college work in with the rest of their schedule.”

**EMPHASIZING ENGAGEMENT**
Greater online access to college resources has also enabled Temple College to address Texas’s 60x30 initiative. The college can now help students cut down on travel time and costs by studying online, and can offer more flexible learning options—such as shorter, accelerated courses over an eight-week format. The greater variety of course selection allows students to tailor their learning experience to their individual situations, providing a boost to completion rates and student engagement.
Furthermore, the college is using the platform to give students more confidence in their own abilities with self-assessment tests and online tutoring services—helping new students gauge their own readiness for online learning, and giving them insight into how to study effectively in an online environment.

The teachers at Temple College have witnessed the impact of D2L’s solutions on student engagement at first hand, and are quick to praise the new ways of engaging with students that Brightspace provides.

Prudence York-Hammons, Ph.D. at the Mathematics Faculty of Temple College says: “There are many things I appreciate about D2L’s Brightspace for use with my classes. I really like the ability to allow students to introduce themselves to the class using the Discussion forums. I can split a course into sections so that students in one class only discuss topics with the other students in the same section, and we can continue those discussions throughout the semester.”

Tracey Cooper, Executive Director of Dell Martin Nursing Education Center at Temple College adds: “Brightspace enables better communication between faculty and students. We have begun to use it to store information that students may need to access off-campus, so they can log in from home and access important documents. We also have told students that our communication with them will be entirely through email on D2L’s Brightspace platform, which ensures that it is secure.”

**MAKING THE BEST USE OF LEARNERS’ TIME**

The email communication system faced a test when a particularly cold winter led to a snow storm in January 2018. St. Amour explains: “We had to close on the first day of our spring semester due to icy conditions, and we were thankful that we had Brightspace in place that day. We were able to communicate with students via email to let them know that the college was partially closed, and recommend that they take a look at their syllabus online. Having the Brightspace platform helped us avoid a wasted day”.

“D2L has been instrumental in helping us achieve our goals. Without the Brightspace platform, there are thousands of students in the Austin area who might have missed out on the education they wanted, through no fault of their own. Now we can make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to learn, regardless of privilege, background or income.”

Brian St. Amour, Division Director, eLearning, Temple College

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*Prudence York-Hammons, Mathematics Faculty Ph.D., Temple College*