Fanshawe College: Empowering students and staff with e-learning innovation

Fanshawe College creates a seamless student experience with an integrated suite of smart learning solutions

To realize the revolutionary potential of online learning, it is critical that students and faculty members can access, create and engage with digital resources easily and conveniently. That’s why Fanshawe College, a long-term client of D2L for the past 16 years, has been working to evolve its learning management system by integrating a host of innovative services and new capabilities.

AT A GLANCE

Student Number: 18,000

Interviewees:
- Linda Young, Senior Manager, Learning Systems Services
- Peter Gilbert, Chief Infrastructure Officer (Facilities and IT Services)
- Lisa Steele-Summers, Educational Support Technologist, Faculty of Business
- Greg Denomme, Learning Systems Services, Educational Technologist
- Karen Klee, Academic Coordinator & Professor, DSW program
- Denis Ishchenko, Honours Bachelor of Commerce (Digital Marketing) Student
- Jihye Lee, Internet Applications and Web Development Student
“The Brightspace platform is an integral part of our academic delivery, and I have always found D2L to be accessible, responsive and invested in the success of Fanshawe College as we serve our students and faculty.”

Peter Gilbert, Chief Infrastructure Officer (Facilities & IT Services), Fanshawe College

SUMMARY
Keen to expand the reach of its post-secondary courses, Fanshawe College worked closely with students, faculty members and D2L to find new ways to make its resources easier for everyone to use. By building on its use of the Brightspace learning management system, the college has been working on a series of innovation projects that will help more students reach their educational goals.

QUICK FACTS
• 90% satisfaction rate for the FanshaweOnline learning platform
• 94% of students use FanshaweOnline on a daily basis to support their studies
• 99% of faculty members now use FanshaweOnline as a teaching aid
• Reduces faculty members’ administrative workload through automation
• Provides new insight to help students and instructors track course progression

BROADENING THE REACH OF EDUCATION
Digital learning is transforming education, and Fanshawe College is among the institutions at the front line of innovation. The college offers over 200 programs and pathways for students. Although the number of courses varies per term, 99 percent of all courses offered at Fanshawe College have an online presence. There are approximately 5,000 courses offered in a wide range of subjects to its 18,000 students. These courses are supported with online services through the college’s FanshaweOnline virtual learning environment, which is powered by D2L’s Brightspace platform.

“We are always on the lookout for new ways to improve the quality, accessibility and convenience of FanshaweOnline,” explains Linda Young, Senior Manager, Learning Systems Services at Fanshawe College. “Developing learning programs that engage students both face-to-face and online requires more than technology alone—students and faculty also need to feel confident in using the virtual learning environment.”

Feedback showed that some students were unsure how to use some features of FanshaweOnline, prompting the college to review the accessibility of its courses.
“Responses to our biennial student survey demonstrated that we could do more to make our digital resources easier to navigate,” continues Young. “We decided to work closely with our student body to enhance the experience. We also saw an opportunity to make our courses for visually impaired students with text-to-speech tools, and deaf students with closed captioning, which we are looking to launch this fall.”

**AUTOMATING ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES**

Faculty members also wanted to find a way to reduce the administrative burden of managing student data across multiple different systems.

“We have around 12 systems that are involved in learning management in one way or another,” explains Young. “In some cases, there was clear room for improvement in the way our faculty had to interact with those systems.

“For example, many of our staff members were using an image scanning machine, which automatically reads and scores responses to multiple-choice questionnaires, helping to reduce the time spent on grading tests. There was such high demand for the image scanning machine that faculty members often had to wait in line to use it—and if it went offline due to a mechanical fault, it really slowed everyone down.”

“Similarly, at the end of term our faculty used to need to transfer student grades from one system, calculate an overall mark manually using spreadsheets, and then transfer this new data into a different system. With thousands of students taking courses, we spent significant amounts of time on grading, and we knew that we could streamline the process through automation.”
LISTENING TO STAFF AND STUDENTS
Ever since Fanshawe College first adopted the Brightspace platform, the college has maintained a continuous feedback loop with D2L, relaying ideas from students and faculty that help the D2L team develop enhancements and new features.

Peter Gilbert, Chief Infrastructure Officer (Facilities and IT Services), comments: “The Brightspace platform is an integral part of our academic delivery, and I have always found D2L to be accessible, responsive and invested in the success of Fanshawe College as we serve our students and faculty.”

To ensure that students always feel confident engaging with its digital resources, Fanshawe College upgraded to the new Daylight user experience (UX) from D2L, which makes online learning features more intuitive for new users.

“One of the great things about Daylight is that we can quickly create and administer surveys that give our students regular opportunities to tell us what they think about the Brightspace platform and our other services,” comments Young. “We can then use their feedback to deliver more targeted training and support. The mix of technology tools and volunteering is having a really positive impact on student engagement.”

For example, Fanshawe College is currently exploring the idea of a ‘tech buddy’ program that would provide a space for senior student volunteers to teach other students about the features of the platform. This would complement the college’s existing student ambassador program, which has already been very successful in driving adoption of FanshaweOnline.

“To further increase learner adoption in online courses, Fanshawe engaged the D2L Learning and Creative Services team to convert 6 face-to-face courses to online. The Learning and Creative Services team worked collaboratively with Fanshawe team on the course conversions and the courses received positive reviews from our students.”

Linda Young, Senior Manager of Learning Systems Services, Fanshawe College

AUTOMATING ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES
The close relationship with D2L has led to a series of initiatives to improve the online learning experience and integrate the D2L Brightspace platform with third-party solutions and services.

To reduce the workload of its staff, Fanshawe College worked with D2L to automate many of the time-consuming administrative tasks associated with administering, grading and recording the results of course assessment activities.
When looking for a replacement for our image scanning machine, we came across Akindi—a digital grading tool that can be easily integrated with the Brightspace platform, in fact we were the first D2L client to complete an integration between Akindi and Brightspace," explains Young.

Instead of having to queue up to use a grading machine, staff can now scan student answer-sheets with any multifunction device (such as a photocopier) and upload them directly to Akindi. Akindi then grades the papers automatically and the results are instantly available to view within Brightspace.

D2L's developer platform, Brightspace API, has enabled Fanshawe College to create their own integrated solutions. This has proved invaluable in automating key processes such as transferring student grades between different systems. In fact, Fanshawe was the first college in Ontario, 10 years ago, to fully automate the transfer of grades from Brightspace to the Ellucian WebAdvisor grading system.

**BOOSTING COURSE ACCESSIBILITY**

Previously, Fanshawe College's students would have to visit an on-campus assessment center to take a WRIT assessment: an initial placement test that all students must take before starting college. However, traveling to take the WRIT test created significant costs and logistical issues for distance learners.

“D2L clearly understood the distance assessment challenge that we faced,” says Young. “The tools provided by the Brightspace platform were key to help our faculty build an online version of the WRIT assessment that we can deliver either on-site or remotely. Students in different provinces or even different countries can take the exam online, eliminating the cost and expense of having to travel to campus. It’s very popular—we now have around 4,000 students per year who prefer to take the test remotely.”

“It’s a testament to a great partnership and a key objective for all of us to constantly increase the inclusivity of our student body and ensure that we can help every member of our community access education,” says Young.
“The ability to integrate a number of applications within the Brightspace platform has allowed for increased ease of use, time efficiency, and better overall experience for the student, instructor, and the administrator.”
Lisa Steele-Summers, Educational Support Technologist, Faculty of Business, Fanshawe College

**KEEPING STUDENTS AND FACULTY HAPPY**

Since enhancing its virtual learning services with help from D2L, Fanshawe College has seen a significant boost in student and faculty satisfaction. 94 percent of students and 89 percent of faculty now log into FanshaweOnline daily, and the platform receives high satisfaction scores from both groups, especially for its course content, assignment management and grading capabilities.

For example, Denis Ishchenko, a digital marketing student at Fanshawe College, says: “I can follow my grades, emails, academic materials, calendar reminders, upcoming events and assignments all in the same place and at the same time. I really appreciate the amount of work dedicated to FanshaweOnline and I enjoy using it every single day!”

Jihye Lee, who is studying Internet Applications and Web Development, agrees: “FanshaweOnline is awesome, easy and fast to use. I like the simple and clean design, and it works great on the web as well as mobile.”

Greg Denomme, Learning Systems Services, Educational Technologist, comments: “Brightspace enhances the student learning experience by offering various tools such as content, discussions, submissions, grades, and intelligent agents. It is easy to use, has a responsive design, and keeps students updated with course notifications.”

“Our students are pleased with the improvements we have made with the Brightspace platform, as well as the student-led initiatives that we have launched to help them engage with digital learning,” explains Young. “We’re proud that our work is helping to make learning more accessible to students across Canada and around the world.”

By automating much of the administration associated with marking and administering tests, faculty members can focus more time on developing pedagogy and refining course content.

“Integrating the Brightspace platform with third party solutions has been a real game-changer for our faculty. Through the Akindi system, staff can get their student assessments graded in around 10 minutes, and our virtual proctoring solution can administer thousands of online examinations each term, with almost no manual effort.”
Linda Young, Senior Manager of Learning Systems Services, Fanshawe College
Lisa Steele-Summers, Educational Support Technologist, Faculty of Business at Fanshawe College, agrees: “The ability to integrate a number of applications within the D2L platform has allowed for increased ease of use, time efficiency, and better overall experience for the student, instructor, and the administrator.”

Karen Klee, Academic Coordinator & Professor at Fanshawe’s Developmental Services Worker (DSW) program adds; “Brightspace allows each professor an opportunity to create and launch content that looks and feels familiar to students across courses and programs. The ability to link students directly to quizzes, calendars, content and videos makes both face to face and blended learning environments easier to navigate. I especially enjoy the ability to integrate online textbooks from compatible publishers, such as McGraw Hill, with FOL’s grading and content pages…my students absolutely love this seamless approach to textbook use and the ease of access has increased the percentage of students using online resources and improved overall grades in my courses.”

In the years ahead, Fanshawe College plans to evolve its online learning resources even further by making more textbook content available to read online, and creating more spaces for dialog between students, staff and course designers.

“With robust, versatile D2L technology and the support of the D2L team, we are well-equipped to continuously develop our online courses and help more people improve their knowledge and broaden their career prospects through learning,”
Linda Young, Senior Manager of Learning Systems Services, Fanshawe College

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