UNIT strengthens its institutional identity with Brightspace

Institution

Universidade Tiradentes (UNIT) is one of the largest institutions of higher learning in the northeast of Brazil. Founded as an educational institution in 1962 in the city of Aracaju, the institution achieved full university status in 1994. Today, it has campuses in several cities in the states of Sergipe, Alagoas and Pernambuco, as well as offering a wide range of courses at distance learning centers across the region, from Vitória da Conquista in Bahia to Mossoró in Rio Grande do Norte.

AT A GLANCE

CHALLENGE

• Implement a comprehensive learning management system
• Harness technology to facilitate teaching activities and increase student engagement
• Optimize in-person exam application from online courses

SOLUTION

• Implemented D2L’s Brightspace platform and deployed tools such as Intelligent Agents to send personalized, real-time emails to each student
• Combined Brightspace and Chromebooks to create a scheduling system for in-person exams and used tools such as Question Library to create exam applications

RESULTS

• Strengthens the institutional identity by increasing teacher-student interaction
• Improves student retention by personalizing communication
• Reduces the time taken to grade exam papers and boosts the cost-efficiency of proofing, printing and logistics
• Helps students concentrate, improving their performance on written tests and reducing the time taken to complete exams
The Challenge

Previously, UNIT had relied on open-source software that only acted as a content repository and could no longer support the institution’s growth. At the same time, both teachers and students were dissatisfied with the level of teaching that was possible with their existing tools.

As a result, the UNIT team recognized a need to move to a comprehensive learning management system (LMS) with much richer functionality, which would enable the institution to intensify the level of interaction between teachers and students and increase the quality of that interaction.

To increase students’ engagement in their studies and enable better performance, the new platform needed to provide personalized and user-focused communication capabilities to make each student feel that there was someone from the university looking after them. The UNIT team had the perception that Brazilian students wanted to interact more directly with the course content, their teachers, and the institution. Moreover, students wanted to have these capabilities in the palms of their hands, enabling them to engage with learning activities on their mobile devices instead of having to use a computer.

According to Lucas do Vale, manager of education technologies at UNIT, the organization needed new technology “to enable students to communicate in new ways, feel engaged with their teachers, and interact with course content in a more direct and objective way in order to succeed in their learning objectives.”

Another major challenge was to improve the scheduling of in-person exams in online subjects that are offered in UNIT’s hybrid courses. This process was quite complicated, because the exams needed to take place across three states and six different municipalities, while being managed centrally.

In addition, it used to take a lot of effort to generate the questions, print the exam papers, schedule exam rooms and invigilators, scan the exam scripts for audit purposes, evaluate each student’s responses and then return the corrected scripts with the students’ grades.

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Lucas do Vale, Manager of Education Technologies, UNIT
The Solution

To replace the existing software and improve its interaction with students, UNIT decided to implement D2L’s Brightspace platform, a comprehensive LMS that offers much more than just a repository for content.

After conducting some initial user acceptance tests with its students, the institution decided to use the Daylight user interface, which provides rich mobile capabilities. For Lucas do Vale, this decision was “very important because it was vital for students to be mobile and to take advantage of the mobile devices they use in their everyday lives.”

As a strategic tool to drive learning, Brightspace provides Intelligent Agents, which enable UNIT to validate, schedule and send feedback emails to students automatically without requiring manual input from teachers—even inserting the name of the student and the signature of the teacher to give each message a more personal feel.

To optimize the process of managing exams, UNIT made a significant investment in cutting-edge technology and formed partnerships with D2L, Google, Samsung and Cisco, among other companies.

The objective was to roll out an online management system for exams, enable teachers to create and publish questions, create a question database that can be used for different tests, and create a new digital way of administering in-person exams for hybrid learning courses, using Chromebooks.

With this new system, when students come to take the exam, instead of receiving a written test, they are given a Chromebook and tasked with answering the questions that are automatically provided by the question database. Their responses are saved and transmitted online, and the teacher can correct them remotely and send the grades back to each student online.

The assistant dean of distance education, Professor Paulo Rafael Nascimento, approves of this hybrid model of teaching, which mixes classroom and online activities. “Distance education at UNIT is growing in leaps and bounds, and it’s obvious that the D2L platform is supporting this growth. The platform has been embraced by the whole academic community in the region of northeast Brazil that we cover. We have ambitions to expand our hybrid model with the D2L platform, which has been well received and is seen as a high-quality option by our students.”
The Results

Implementing the D2L Brightspace platform has had a positive overall impact on learning, managing student retention and institutional identity for UNIT.

In a learning context, the platform has enabled UNIT to improve the way it manages the content published for each area of the curriculum in the LMS.

From the communications point of view, the use of Intelligent Agents allows UNIT to foster greater empathy in all the interactions between teachers and students, due to its ability to automatically personalize and track a wide variety of types of messages at scale. This has also contributed to strengthening the identity of the institution and increasing student engagement—which ultimately improves student retention.

On the other hand, the creation of a new online management system for exams has simplified the scheduling process for both teachers and learners, while avoiding the risk of timetable clashes.

The use of Chromebooks provides students with a more comprehensive user experience, since a single system handles both the administration of exams and the delivery of results. It also eliminates the need to print exam papers and the associated costs, reduces the number of invigilators required by 86 percent, cuts the time spent on grading, helps students concentrate better during exams, and in turn, minimizes the time taken to complete each exam.

Another benefit for UNIT is that the platform provides a more comprehensive way to track student activity, a central point of control for learning management, and a reduction in exam costs. Finally, it enables the same technologies to be used in both online and classroom learning, providing a single platform and a consistent experience for all learners.

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Paulo Rafael Nascimento, Assistant Dean of Distance Education, UNIT