



# Enabling Active-Learning at Ghent University

Practice-based learning programmes enabled by the Brightspace platform

**Interviewee: Prof. Dr. Annelies Decloedt**

## AT A GLANCE

**Client:** Ghent University, Belgium

**Learners:** 200/41,000

**Industry:** Higher Education

### Challenge:

- To equip students with the appropriate tools and clinical skills ahead of laboratory practice sessions
- Creating individual learning pathways for trainee veterinarians with regular feedback and full insight into individual student progress

### Solution:

- Brightspace

### Results:

- 200 students using an online bank of multimedia content to actively learn ahead of practical lessons, building on their skills
- Lecturers able to deliver more flexible learning programmes and tailored learning pathways
- Rubrics and metrics enabling lecturers to track each students' progress online

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*Professor Doctor Annelies Decloedt, Ghent University*

## INTRODUCTION

Ghent University is a public research university located in Ghent, Belgium. Ghent University is a top 100 university and one of Belgium's largest leading institutions of higher education, with over 41,000 students and 9,000 staff members. UGent has campuses not only in the Ghent region, but also in Courtrai, Ostend, Bruges and South Korea.

A key aspect of Ghent University's educational strategy is the promotion and encouragement of active learning, wherein students can study more practically and develop an ongoing learning behaviour, rather than passively receiving information from lecturers.

This is a major initiative for the University, and D2L's Brightspace platform was chosen as the learning management system (LMS) best-suited to facilitate this change. Ghent University deployed the Brightspace platform across the University in phases, with a university-wide rollout completed in September 2019.

The robust feature set has inspired lecturers to embark on additional, interactive and creative new teaching models—enabling lecturers to pursue more rewarding classroom activities or lesson plans.

In the lead up to the full deployment in September 2019, the Brightspace platform was used by a number of professors and lecturers from varied academic disciplines so that they might share their experiences with other professors and lecturers ahead of the full rollout. We will be sharing three stories showcasing how these lecturers are using the Brightspace platform in innovative ways.

[Read Sofie Hondeghem's story here.](#)

[Read Veerle Fack's story here.](#)

Here are the experiences of Professor Doctor Annelies Decloedt—Skillslab, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine.

## PROFESSOR DOCTOR ANNELIES DECLOEDT

Prof. Dr. Decloedt teaches veterinarian-client communication skills and clinical skills relevant to the treatment of companion animals and large farm animals, including horses and cows. Hers is a highly practical course, which aims to help students develop different clinical skills ranging from performing safe injections to effective communication with animal owners. She had previously found it challenging to equip students with appropriate tools to study the teaching materials before lab-based practice sessions,



and this was something she hoped to overcome with a new learning platform. The Brightspace platform not only gives her students an opportunity to revise in a flexible, on-demand way, but also enables her to enhance the programme by creating learning paths, as well as providing extensive evaluations.

The course delivered by Prof. Dr. Decloedt requires many hours of hands-on practice, in the university's Skillslab. Dummy models and simulators are used to teach a number of clinical skills, such as sutures, injections and more advanced skills such as anaesthesia or medical imaging. The trainee veterinarians start by practising basic skills such as handling animals and then progress over the years to perform more complex procedures on simulators such as intubation or neutering.

However, as Prof. Dr. Decloedt admits, teaching practical skills in the Skillslab was often difficult due to the significant number of students (200 currently on this course, with 1,000 using it every year) and limited availability of space and personnel. With fully booked and often overcrowded workshops, the Brightspace platform has alleviated scheduling issues and enabled students to view and study material in their own time.

“The course that I teach is practice-based, which means it is not conducted solely in a traditional learning environment, where students sit in a class and listen to theoretical presentations. The tasks are much more tactile. Brightspace enables us to effectively bridge the gap between practical assignments and virtual materials through the use of interactive options,”

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Two significant benefits of the Brightspace platform are flexibility and convenience, as all course material and learning data is gathered in one place.



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*Professor Doctor Annelies Decloedt, Ghent University*

“Using Brightspace has been easy and straightforward so far, especially in terms of accessing videos and other interactive content. Applying more creativity to the course and developing tailored learning paths enhances the experience and makes it easier for students to remember key information.

“What I also find very useful is that everything is available in one virtual space. The platform is easy to navigate. With each test linked to a module, and access to extensive online data around the progress of my students, I can directly see how Brightspace streamlines my work.”

Prof. Dr. Decloedt is also impressed by the number and variety of different functionalities which are offered to lecturers.

“The platform is complex in a way that it gives lecturers lots of opportunities to make studying more interactive, and helps create more appealing learning modules. Although I use Brightspace every day, I know there are functions and solutions that are yet to be explored and applied to daily teaching.”

Brightspace has not only been embraced by the lecturers themselves. As Prof. Dr. Decloedt says, students have also reacted positively to the platform change.

“The adoption process went smoothly. After the first phase of implementation, students quickly grasped how the platform works and how to make the best of it. They really appreciate its transparency and intuitiveness. The overall feedback has been very positive, and I haven't heard any complaints, which is a good thing.”

With the overall improvement for both lecturers and students so far, Prof. Dr. Decloedt is certain that she will further expand her use of the Brightspace platform in the future. One of the features she would like to focus on and utilise are individual and group voluntary sessions, with an option to sign in for particular timeslots via the platform.

“I want to better manage the time I spend helping students,” she concludes.

Prof. Dr. Decloedt plans to leverage rubrics, which allow a lecturer to establish set criteria for grading assignments, display the number of points students were awarded for each criterion after an assignment, and to provide customised feedback. As all of the courses at UGent will be using the Brightspace platform in the next year, she intends to share her methods and learn more about how other lecturers use it.