

# The art and science of helping adults learn

**A guide to prepare community colleges for the “new traditional” learner using an LMS.**



Understanding the unique learning style that adults bring to their education is the foundation upon which community colleges create the most effective offering. In the 1970s, Malcolm Knowles identified 6 principles of adult learning that are not only relevant to today's modern community college student, but are also specifically addressed by a learning management system (LMS). So much work is being done in community colleges to help address the unique needs of this growing enrolment, but is it being done efficiently and effectively enough? With the anticipated increase in adult learners seeking to upgrade work skills, building transfer credits, or completing their GED, are community colleges sufficiently prepared to leverage their education technology tools, such as an LMS, to successfully manage, monitor, and improve student outcomes?

First, let's consider a few foundational educational principles about the ways people learn, then more fully explore the ways in which an LMS can help community colleges optimize student success and institutional effectiveness.

## What is Andragogy?

This term coined by Malcolm Knowles in the 1970s refers to a scientific approach to understanding how adults (in particular) learn. Knowles reduced the theory down to the 6 principles of adult learning.

Source: <http://instructionaldesign.org/theories/andragogy/>

# 01

## Adults are internally motivated and self-directed

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Adult learners tend to show a greater readiness to learn and prefer to make choices based upon their preferred choice of specific skills they require. Adult learners desire to be more of a partner in their own education. They prefer to make their own choices. Therefore it is important that academic advisors be proactive in moments when an adult learner may be reticent to ask for help. Not all students raise their hands. And this is where an LMS can really help.

### What an Higher Education LMS can do

Daily student data within an LMS gives advisors an overview of each student's progress and engagement within their courses and programs. This allows faculty members and advisors to identify at-risk behavior quickly, easily, and efficiently. Such proactive response capabilities lets students know that support is always available, sometimes even before they're aware they require it.

***“With data drawn from Brightspace,  
we can intervene with an at-risk  
student even before they’re  
aware they’re at risk.”***

*-Matthew Thornton, Associate Vice President, Student Technology Experience,  
Southern New Hampshire University*

# 02

## Adults bring life experiences and knowledge to learning experiences



Adult learners can sometimes feel challenged when their personal, professional, and educational experiences aren't taken into account. For example, a student may be required to re-take certain skills training that they already know, which in turn causes delays in their education and frustration at the process. In addition, mature students bring with them a wealth of knowledge that can be a huge benefit to their instructors, but also peers. Finding ways to encourage the sharing of life experiences, working those into their coursework as their insights evolve can help to improve a course with each iteration.

### **The LMS effect**

The LMS provides a terrific platform for supporting effective engagement whether it's peer-to-peer, peer-to-instructor, or peer-to-peers. Discussions can be designed to tap life lessons, war stories, and allow students to develop deeper social and academic bonds. This is one of the drivers that adult learners look for in quality educational experiences: the opportunity to grow and build their networks.

# 03

## Adults are goal oriented



Adult learners generally attend college for very specific reasons, and they often have a limited timeline and budget to achieve their goals. They need to know that their studies can be managed along a concrete timeline leading to their clear, intended outcomes (i.e., credentials, certification). In the case where a student is taking training as a necessity for their job, the employer will also be interested in knowing the status and progress of their employees, whose education they're potentially funding.

### The LMS effect

The LMS is a data treasure trove that can effectively be used for setting and monitoring key performance goals and indicators by students, faculty, advisors, and even employers. Students can take advantage of class progress tools to track their studies and estimate the time required to achieve their goals. At the same time, employers and accreditors can see whether program standards are being met and that employees are engaging at the level that is required to continue in the program.

# 04

## Adults are relevancy oriented



Regardless of the medium, the job of educators is to engage with students in a meaningful way and work towards providing content and feedback that is truly relevant to their student's needs. Designing and providing a well-thought out learning path is incredibly important so students remain highly attentive and engaged in their studies. Relevancy, utility, not-wasting time – these are the hallmarks of adulthood. Being learner-focused will always give an institution an added advantage.

### The LMS effect

A proper LMS gives colleges the power to customize or personalize the learning experience for students in multiple ways. For example, after a piece of reading material, instructors can create a video of themselves to provide additional support for the text. This could lead to a suggested YouTube video for even more insight. Using audio and video feedback, links to external web sources, and maintaining a consistent interaction with the student will encourage students to see the relevancy of the content they're studying. Having all these resources and the entire course content available online, accessible on mobile devices, will enable students to engage with material whenever they're ready.

# 05

## Adults are practical



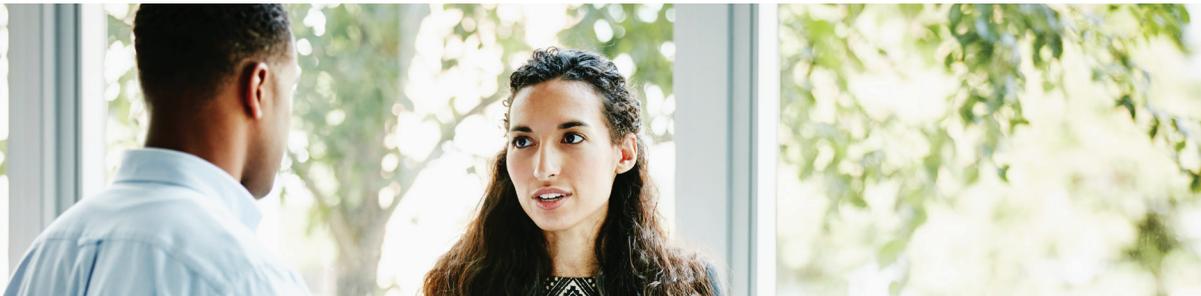
With limited time and resources, adult learners want their education to be efficient and align directly with their expected outcomes. In other words, they are there for a reason and require real-world training and a hands-on experience. Community colleges can provide tools that not only show that learners are on track and meeting each learner's timeline, but also support learners in getting the skills and education they're looking for.

### **The LMS effect**

Online or virtual simulations have grown in use and deployment across many fields of study. The LMS provides a strong platform for integrating third party materials that often take advantage publisher content and tools including simulations, augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) applications. The LMS is the nerve center that should be able to evolve and expand as education technologies continue to evolve.

# 06

## Adult learners like to be respected



Not all education experiences may have been successful for the adult learner. They may have negative feelings about the way they have been treated in the past. They are looking for and more importantly, expecting collaborative support from educators and advisors. They expect to be heard, to be understood, and they want effective, efficient collaborative opportunities within their education experience. Adult learners often prefer face-to-face interactions with their support system and look for an education that is personalized to their unique needs.

### The LMS effect

Collaboration should be simple and intuitive in an LMS. All interactions and engagements should be easy for learners to do wherever they are—at home, riding in a car, or waiting in an airport. Feedback, the essential ingredient to student success, can take place using audio tools, video tools, real-time, recorded, instant messaging, email, embedded within an assignment or free-standing. At the same time, a robust LMS can allow colleges to reach students through automated emails or awards triggered by positive and at-risk behaviors. Even automated, this type of communication helps to let the adult learner know that they are being supported and there is always an avenue of communication that they can access.

# Summary

A learning management system can be a strong ally in supporting student success and institutional effectiveness. Not only should it support adult learning principles, it should allow an institution to thrive on them.

Meeting students where they are and where they are going to be is no longer an option for colleges. It's important for educational institutions to be deeply data-savvy and data-informed. The more colleges are able to take advantage of such a powerful platform, the better they are positioned to succeed and grow in an ever increasingly competitive adult learning marketplace.

In the end, the better an institution is at leveraging the insights afforded by their LMS, the better they will be positioned to achieve their institutional missions and serve every student as effectively and efficiently as possible.





## About D2L

D2L is the software leader that makes learning experiences better. The company's cloud-based platform is easy to use, flexible, and smart. With Brightspace, organizations can personalize the experience for every learner to deliver real results. The company is a world leader in learning analytics: its platform predicts learner performance so that organizations can take action in real-time to keep learners on track. Brightspace is used by learners in higher education, K-12, and the enterprise sector, including the Fortune 1000. D2L has operations in the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, Brazil, and Singapore.

## Contact Us

Phone: 1-519-772-0325 (Worldwide)

Toll Free: 1-888-772-0325 (North America)  
+44-203-695-8580 (United Kingdom and Europe)  
0-800-452-069 (New Zealand)  
1-800-778-631 (Australia)  
0-800-891-4507 (Brazil)

Fax: 1-519-772-0324

Email: [ContactUs@D2L.com](mailto:ContactUs@D2L.com)

Facebook: [facebook.com/D2LInc](https://facebook.com/D2LInc)

Twitter: [@D2L](https://twitter.com/D2L)

Web: [www.D2L.com](http://www.D2L.com)