



D2L

DESIRE2LEARN

Meeting the Challenge of Growth Together

Southern New Hampshire U. and D2L



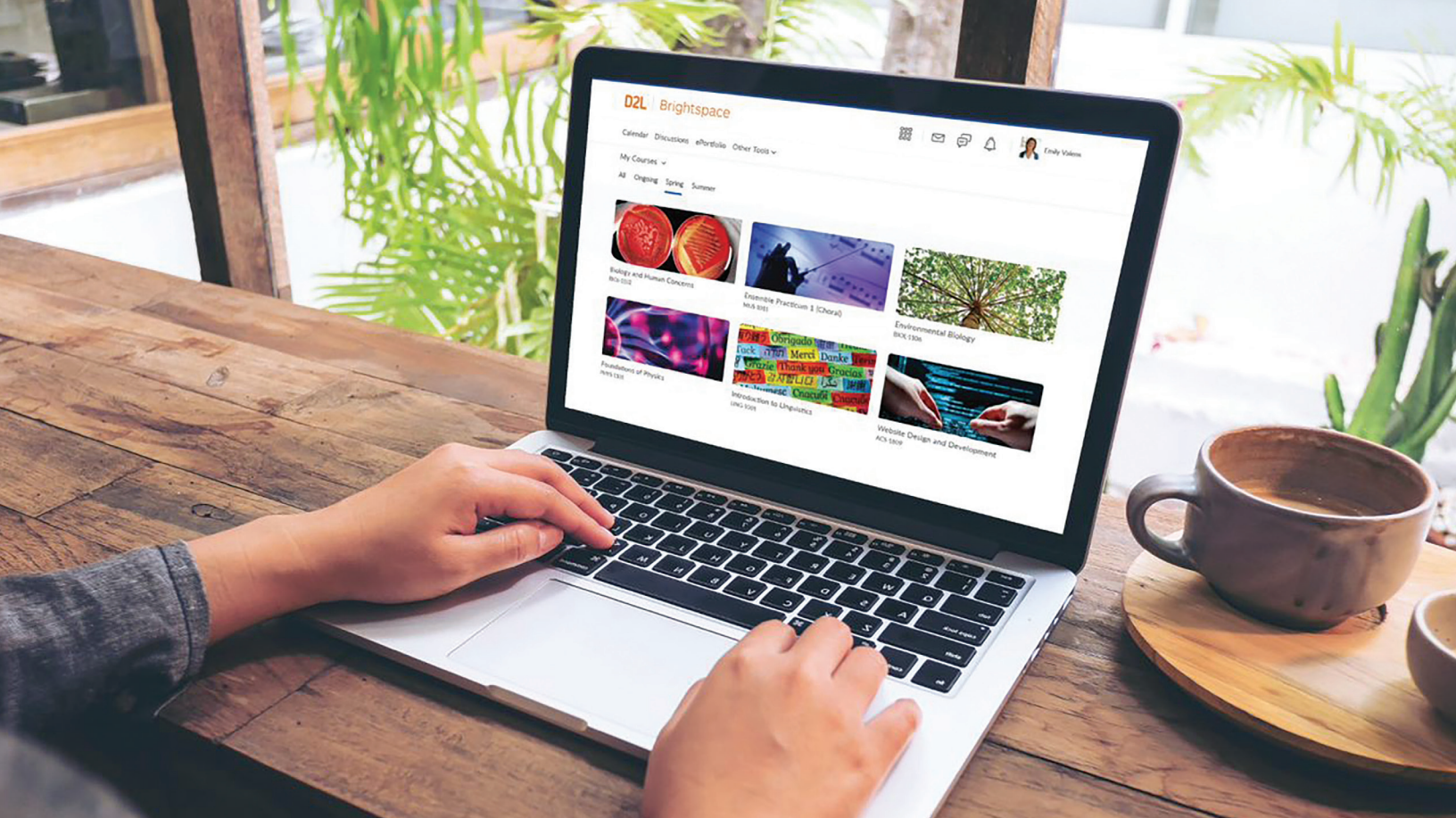
In 2016, Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) was going through an unparalleled period of growth. Based in the USA, the university supports learners there and around the globe, and had recently seen its enrollment surge from 11,000 to more than 96,000 in a span of just five years.

SNHU had increased the size of its student body largely by finding new pathways for nontraditional learners: working adults, people seeking competency-based programs, those who previously hadn't been able to afford college — even international refugees. But the university's mission of expanding access to education had run up against a wall. SNHU's

existing learning management system (LMS), which it had used since 2003, was no longer able to meet the needs of SNHU.

Years of customizing the system had made retrofitting and improving it nearly impossible. In addition, any upgrades required the LMS to be shut down, disrupting around-the-clock access for SNHU students and making it harder for them to get coursework and assistance.

As their existing vendor contract came to an end, university officials discussed the prospect of taking on a new technology company instead. What they needed was a partner that had the flexibility to support the various SNHU business models and who would be invested in working closely with the university on ways to consistently improve the system once it was up and running, investing in both its current and future state.



A successful transition would involve linking upwards of 150,000 users — administrators, faculty, and students — with the university, migrating or creating 6,000 courses, processing approximately 100,000 university records, and integrating several dozen third-party technology partners — all within months of going online. And it was imperative that this all be managed without disruption to users.

In July 2016, SNHU sent representatives to the Fusion conference, run by the education software company D2L, to identify potential education-technology vendors. There, they met with company reps who introduced them to D2L's LMS, Brightspace.

D2L would go on to spend most of the next year consulting with SNHU leaders about the challenges they were looking to solve. Key to this was a system that would help SNHU grow while maintaining the rigor of its coursework.

6,000 courses
100,000 university records
150,000 users

In the end, SNHU was won over by the value and quality of D2L and Brightspace. D2L could deliver Brightspace without major disruption or customization, could do it within an extremely compressed timeline, and could meet all of the numerical goals surprisingly quickly. What's more, the company could do it as a full and ongoing partner with SNHU, one with a strong history of innovation which would ensure the university's LMS was kept relevant to an ever-growing global student body.

The Process: Forging Ahead Together

By August 2016, D2L digital experts had become regulars on at Southern New Hampshire University. “We were on site every four to six weeks for the next 10 to 12 months,” says Ben Campbell, the Director of the Solutions Engineering – Education team at D2L. “I had a regular room at the Manchester Hilton Garden Inn.”

Even though a deal hadn’t yet been inked, D2L felt that such a lengthy, pre-contract courtship was an important prerequisite.

“We wanted to understand them as well as we could before we even suggested a system that would work for them,” Campbell adds. “We spent a lot of time talking so we could learn their needs, as well as learn the pains they were facing at the time with their old system. It wasn’t until the third or fourth visit with them that we even plugged in a laptop.”

“We wanted to make sure they understood every aspect of the LMS and how the change would impact their users so there were no surprises during the implementation and launch.” adds Tracey Schneider, Manager of Implementation Services at D2L.

The two partners identified 20 “pain points” that SNHU needed resolved. University officials were looking for a system that, in keeping with the innovative education projects they were currently undertaking, would:

- support the design and development of courses that would meet the needs of a wide range of learners, and deliver them across several platforms;
- give students a seamless experience between online, on-campus, and competency-based courses, and via mobile devices; and
- create a holistic digital view of each student so academic advisors could more effectively monitor their progress.

As the relationship between the two parties deepened, each saw the mutual benefits to their partnership. For one thing, D2L wanted to do more than sell a product.





We didn't want to just tell them about our services and repeat ourselves," ... We needed to have skin in the game, just as they did. To make an impact in the ed-tech field, we wanted to be as transparent as we could be. If we wanted a solid partnership, that was the way we'd have to do it."

SNHU also valued the advantages of leveraging Brightspace, including the fact that the system is cloud-hosted. The cloud optimizes availability — a major benefit to a university that now serves more than 130,000 learners around the world 24 hours a day — while allowing the university to enhance personalization for every learner.

D2L's Schneider added that the company took on managing all aspects of the environments in the cloud for the university, including security, performance, and scalability.

Brightspace's functionality advantages for constructing courses, enrolling students immediately, intervening when students are having problems, and maintaining usability across platforms were additional major selling points.

As were D2L's stated goal of beating the industry's standard timeline for implementation — typically 120 working days for clients much smaller and less complex than SNHU — and the company's extensive experience working with large universities.

D2L saw great potential in a partnership with SNHU. With more than 3,000 on-campus students, and over 130,000 students fully online, the university is large, still growing, and has a well-earned reputation for innovation. Its growing profile and rapid pace of change within higher ed offered D2L a challenge worth taking on.

"Everybody's talking about them. Their long-term goals and our long-term goals align nicely," says Stacy Denunzio, an Implementation Consultant at D2L. "We leverage our SNHU experience to help make other institutions we work with successful."

The SNHU team appreciated D2L's commitment and candor.

"D2L felt like an extension of our team," says Karen Parker, Senior Director of Strategic Initiatives at SNHU. "There were many times when we had to escalate, meaning we were working on a solution together, but not getting it as quickly as we needed. We made them aware that these areas were priorities for us. And they responded to those requests."

"If SNHU grows, then D2L grows," adds April Oman, Senior Vice President for Customer Engagement at D2L. "We want to change the way the world learns and so do they. There's almost a maniacal focus on both sides to get things working. The partnership seems natural."

Finetuning the Plan

To ensure consistent progress and adherence to the tight timelines, Southern New Hampshire University and D2L each set up governance and steering committees to drive the new technology. Those parallel groups would meet biweekly to talk about how D2L's products could best be implemented and used.

"Establishing lines of communication and progress reporting was critical to the program's success," says Tracey Schneider, Manager of Implementation Services at D2L.

The launch was achieved in a mere 86 workdays. D2L's experience helping clients at large and complex institutions was essential to this process. D2L ramped up training for campus stakeholders to help them understand the new, emerging LMS, spending even more time talking with the university's first-year-experience staff and technical staff to advise them on rolling out the system.

"We did a lot on change management," says Mike Moore, a Senior Advisory Consultant at D2L.

"The focus wasn't on software or hardware management as much as it was on the people side — how to communicate, train, and raise awareness of what needed to be done and what the possibilities were. It was about managing the transition to Brightspace in a way that's understandable to humans."

Meanwhile, SNHU's Learning Sciences and Academic Technology teams met with D2L staff on a regular cadence. Company consultants, Technical Account Managers, and Creative Services and Product Management teams worked with SNHU to pore over design issues.

By fall of 2018, almost everyone at SNHU was fully active and online. SNHU administrators were ecstatic with the results.

"We knew we had to do the whole thing and do it fast," recalls Gerry Fulbrook, Associate Vice President, Academic Technologies, at SNHU. "I was new to SNHU, and while I didn't believe it to be impossible, I now understand just how 'impossible' our accomplishment was."



Ease in Adoption

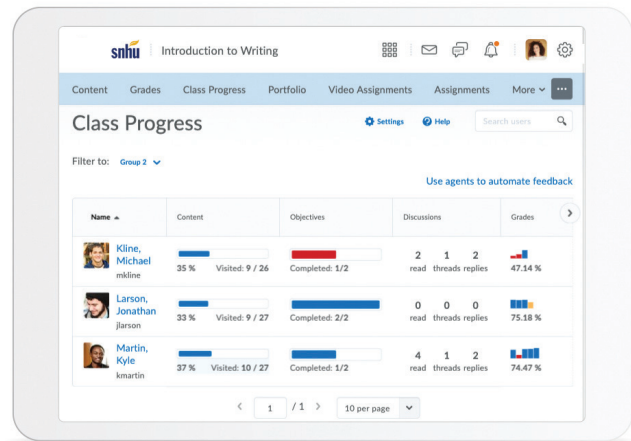
Southern New Hampshire University was looking to unify its 130,000 students via Brightspace technology, offering most of the same functions to refugees in Africa as it did to students on its traditional campus in Manchester, and all points in between.

As Brightspace was rolled out, SNHU officials and D2L began to test and monitor how faculty members and students felt about it.

Almost immediately following the tech upgrade, SNHU students and faculty reacted strongly in favor of the new LMS. Though D2L and the university had expected some level of disruption, the advent of Brightspace resulted in a less than 2 percent negative change in the university's business metrics early on — well below what is typically experienced during a sweeping tech transformation.

“We had expected there to be a downturn in customer satisfaction, perhaps some loss of productivity or efficiency,” says SNHU's Gerry Fulbrook, Associate Vice President, Academic Technologies. “We worried over whether students could complete assignments at the same pace, given the transition. What we found was a very small slowdown over the first two terms [in 2017 and 2018], but not to the point where it adversely affected their grades.”

Over all, students have applauded the advent of Brightspace. During the past six months (after the system became nearly fully functional



across the SNHU's main campus) the number of total logins increased by around 35 percent.

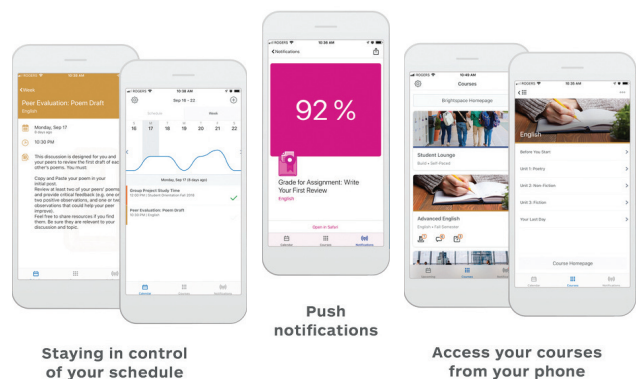
And the enthusiasm hasn't been limited to SNHU's on-campus students. D2L wanted to make sure that nontraditional online adult learners, which SNHU continues to enroll at higher and higher rates, could quickly become comfortable using Brightspace as well. Many of them say it was time for a major change.

“The old system was antiquated,” says Kristine Ducote, a 50-year-old criminal-justice major who studies online. “There were no links to



academic support or buttons to click where I could see all my classes and assignments. It was just the basics.”

Brightspace offered a strong solution. Ducote accesses Brightspace on her laptop first thing in the morning. By clicking on home-page tiles representing each of her courses, she can view announcements on what is happening in her classes, see her course assignments and related learning modules, parse her grades, and take part in discussions with her classmates. She can also easily bookmark her favorite files.



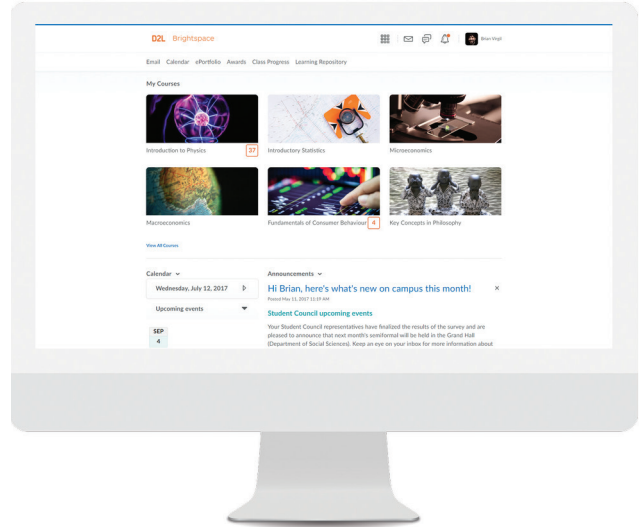
Staying in control of your schedule

Push notifications

Access your courses from your phone

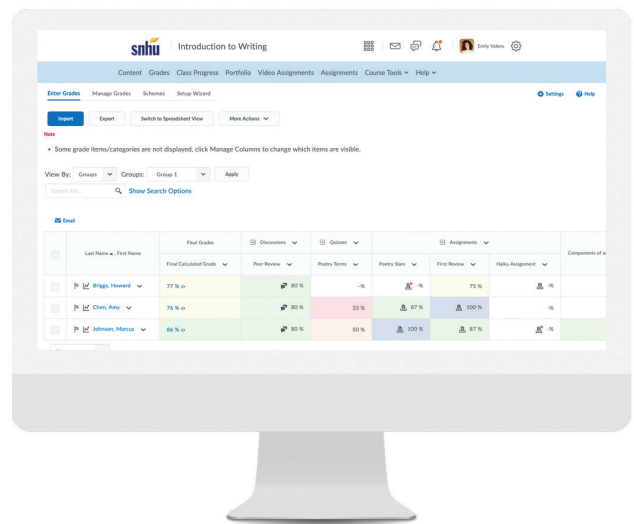
“

It’s a one-stop shop. As soon as you’re on Brightspace, you get a visual snapshot of where you are in a course. You can see the feedback from your teacher. Your class schedule is right there,” ... You can access all your services — student support, the library, advising, the online writing center. It takes a few minutes at most to get there. That’s what’s so neat about it.”



Brightspace’s responsive functions, readily accessible on the SNHU home page, make it easier for her to get around the virtual campus. “It’s a breeze to navigate,” Ducote says. “It just makes it easier to learn because you’re not wasting time hunting around for things. It’s all right there.”

Although Ducote prefers to work on a laptop, other students may take quizzes, handle assignments, access instructor feedback, and do a host of other functions via a mobile web browser using their phone or tablet. Brightspace adjusts automatically so they can access all of it on any device.



Flexibility in Designing Courses

Like students, faculty members report a high level of satisfaction using Brightspace.

During the transition, Southern New Hampshire University offered faculty three hours of self-guided tutorials on the system, including practice exercises. That was more than enough time for most to familiarize themselves, says Jennifer Johnson, a member of the online nursing faculty.

At the time of the rollout, Johnson was the Associate Dean at SNHU's College of Online and Continuing Education. "There were faculty who were resistant, as you'll see during any meaningful change," she notes, "but most were resilient."

By offering additional training to those who were slow to warm up to Brightspace initially, many more became comfortable with the system.

They came to appreciate the new features that better linked them with students, Johnson

adds. What's more, educators can employ adjunct methods to connect with their students. For example, they can post additional video explanations on tricky concepts or content areas, post extra links or resources in announcements or offer outside virtual meetings for students who need additional support.

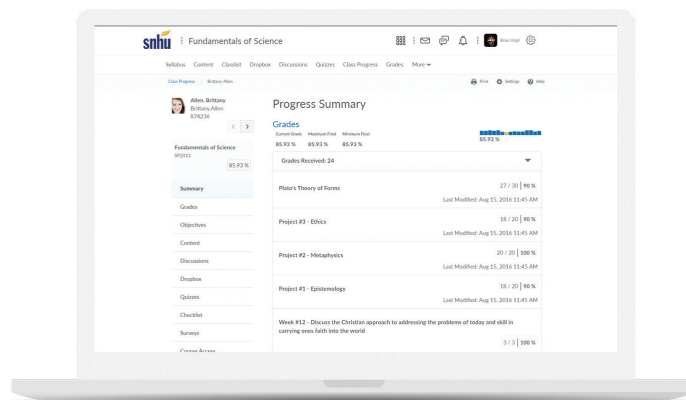
Brightspace allows faculty to monitor what students are talking about regarding a course online via a discussions page. "It's kind of a water-cooler page," says Johnson. "It gives us a chance to interact with students outside the course."

The announcements page for each class offers "a place where faculty can really shine," Johnson says. "You can add your style or other materials, or explain something in a different way."



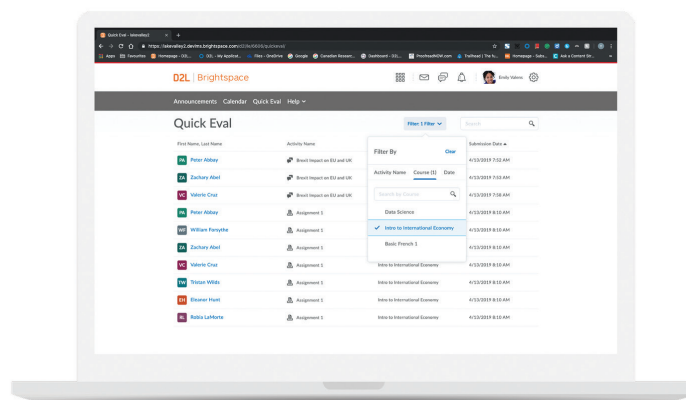
“

Brightspace offers us a lot more flexibility,” ... “It also saves me a lot of time. I can have several pages open at the same time on Brightspace, including my grade book, the class rubric, and discussion pages.”



For competency-based education students who require different methods for learning concrete skills and the mastery of specific (often job-based) tasks Brightspace affords course designers and educators the flexibility to reach them.

“In many instances, we can create small, plug-and-play learning experiences that can stack into larger experiences and credentials over time,” says Greg Fowler, President of SNHU’s Global Campus, which includes all of the university’s online students. “The learning management system has to be able to do that.”



Brightspace also offers SNHU the ability to closely monitor performance. By looking at data that Brightspace collects from its users — including grades, the numbers of assignments submitted, grades on first submissions, and the numbers of calls to the academic help center — university officials can more readily determine if interventions by advisors and other support staff are necessary to help keep students on track for success.

Seamless Upgrades and Improvements

An LMS partner's ability to deliver new functions seamlessly was paramount for Southern New Hampshire University. The university's governance and steering committees, along with its communication teams, helped D2L run ongoing functionality rollouts smoothly.

"Southern New Hampshire U. was apprehensive about our continuous delivery process and the monthly updates we had planned for their system," says Tracey Schneider, the Manager of Implementation Services at D2L. "The governance structure really helped us get everyone on the same page about what was coming down the line. They ended up very pleased with how we were doing things."

Post-rollout, D2L continued to make improvements without disrupting users. It regularly sends out 90-day previews of upgrades to SNHU technologists and leaders. The company then rolls out new functionalities on a monthly basis, with no disruptions.

SNHU leaders meet weekly with D2L to plan what's in the pipeline for Brightspace at SNHU. Executives from both organizations meet quarterly to discuss the malleability of the system and what more it can do.

"We're engaged in an ongoing discussion about leveraging new capabilities that affect educational quality," says Gerry Fulbrook, Associate Vice President, Academic Technologies, at SNHU.

The drive toward a successful and ongoing improvement plan is mutual. The university

will test new Brightspace elements extensively, including ones that have not yet been made available to other institutions, and then offer feedback to the company.

"Often, they are able to fix things based on what we tell them right on the spot," says Fulbrook.

According to Tom Dionisio, Executive Vice President, Technology and Transformation at SNHU — in the time that SNHU has been on Brightspace (Oct 30, 2017 to today), they have had more application upgrades than in their entire time on their previous LMS.

In addition, instant accessibility and growth — two of the major factors SNHU was searching for as it looked to replace its former LMS — have been consistent throughout the university's experience with D2L. Within the past year, it has folded D2L's Spanish-language packet into the system, along with its Quick Eval assessment tool and an annotation feature.



During the first 18 months with D2L, we have adopted more new functionalities than we did with our previous LMS vendor every five years,"



D2L's leadership in the ed-tech field comes in part from its ability to form relationships with top institutions so it can better learn how to help all of its clients — large, medium, and small.

The D2L/SNHU partnership is a case in point. The two organizations participate in conferences together. They help hone each other's offerings and expertise. They listen to each other as problems arise so they can fix them together.

"Working with customers like SNHU early on in the development phase, it allows us to make sure we are hitting the mark on the needs of our customers early — allowing us to make the tools available for all our clients," says D2L's Schneider.

D2L continues to support SNHU in using its ever-growing data set to improve student outcomes. SNHU also continues to benefit from a cadence of monthly enhancements and innovations.

"Going forward, the two organizations will continue to work together on how best to structure traditional courses, broaden the faculty's ability to develop courses, and improve competency-based programs," says Fulbrook. "Already, we can structure our offerings with much greater flexibility than we had imagined. We are confident we can move forward together and build on that."

Achieving Excellence

Though Southern New Hampshire University has a reputation for unprecedented growth and for offering quality education to groups that fall outside the traditional student pool, it shuns growth for growth's sake. It expects its partners to do the same.

The university continues to enhance not just the breadth, but the quality of the education it offers, with an end goal of providing affordable education to more and more people around the world.

As new educational technologies, including ones based in rapidly developing artificial intelligence and virtual-reality tools, become available, university leaders look forward to reaching more students in novel ways — and with ongoing expertise from D2L.

Recently, D2L has taken an active role in an SNHU program designed to fill in the skills gaps some workers and recent graduates face. The university offers companies affordable non-degree credentials, competency-based

courses, and degree programs so they can help their student employees improve their skills and educational levels.

In May 2019, D2L unveiled a program designed to reach more of those workers so it can help them develop the “soft skills” necessary to thrive in a future with new technology. The new workplace partnership program will be fully integrated with SNHU and will reach more people than the university’s program alone.

“Our aspirations are not about growth so much as they are about increasing access for those who have not had it in the past, wherever and whoever they are,” says Greg Fowler, President of SNHU’s Global Campus. “D2L will continue to be a cornerstone in that experience as long as they keep their eyes on learner success. Their responsiveness, agility, creativity, and ultimately, their passion, make them a good partner for us.”





D2L
DESIRE2LEARN

Southern New Hampshire U. and D2L