

## Offering Choice – Providing students with options for access to learning at Canadore College

### Opportunity

At Canadore College, with three campuses in North Bay and one in Parry Sound, students have asked for more access to technology and for more options for learning, including being able to take programs off-campus. To provide this flexibility, online learning has been combined with other formats for distance education, such as audioconferencing, to offer province-wide access to certificate and diploma programs. The enhanced learning opportunities offered by Desire2Learn (D2L), their new learning management system, are being explored.



### Innovation

Four programs demonstrate how students are offered flexibility in accessing learning, and the introduction of D2L offers even more choices.

School of Sport and Recreation: Three programs in the School of Sports and Recreation, Recreation and Leisure Services, Recreation Therapy, and Rural Recreation, offer students a choice of taking courses in-class, as live web-based audioconferences, or online with recorded lectures anywhere and anytime that fits within their schedule for assignments. Each course is supplemented with resources, communication possibilities, and links to further information – all offered via iLearn, the Canadore portal for D2L. Every student receives identical lectures and materials as the in-class lecture is delivered over the web and recorded for later use. The student can choose, from week to week, whether to attend class face-to-face or over the web, whether synchronously or asynchronously.

For each class, there is an audio lecture supplemented by PowerPoint slides. There may also be YouTube links, use of the interactive whiteboard, case studies, and text chat for the synchronous learners.

Testing for in-class and online learners is consistent and both groups have access to all approved options. Tests are posted on iLearn; students have five days to complete and submit. This avoids off-site proctoring of exams. Exams are also offered in-class.

Child Development Practitioner: Canadore offers a Child Development Practitioner apprenticeship that allows the students to work as a paid apprentice while taking theory classes offered in class, through Contact North (Ontario's distance education and training network), and online. The program can be completed in three years, and the graduates have a combination of sound theoretical knowledge and experience in the practical aspects of the profession. Students who successfully complete six additional specific courses can receive an Early Childhood Development Diploma upon completion. An Early Childhood Education diploma is offered full-time at Canadore.

The use of D2L varies by instructor, with possibilities for group discussions, quizzes, grade posting, course content, PowerPoint slides, video streaming, e-mail, and student-to-student interaction. Similar to the Recreation programs described above, the Childhood Development Practitioner makes use of the Contact North to provide live, web-based audioconferences, supplemented by online resources.

Introducing Desire2Learn: D2L was introduced in September 2011, with some minimum standards for the mandatory posting on the system:

- Course outline;
- Contact information;
- Course syllabus and learning objectives;
- Grades and how the grades are allocated to various assignments; and
- Attendance as a tool for determining students who are at risk of dropping out.

All faculty members were trained on D2L over a two-month period, starting with an hour of work similar to that they would be assigning to students, such as the use of discussion tools and Dropbox for assignment delivery. In this way, they begin with an understanding of the student experience and preliminary capabilities of the system. Faculty then attend a three-hour intensive workshop to learn basic system functionality and are provided the tools to meet the minimum standards.

## Outcomes and Benefits

School of Sport and Recreation: Given the choice, many students are taking the online option – often more than attend in-class. Making the programs available in multiple formats has increased registrations, both full- and part-time, bringing in students from around the province who are able to earn their diploma or certificate fully online. Issues of

equal delivery and quality control are addressed in this model as it is the exact same course available in all formats.

Online students have set up their own study groups, communicating online and supporting each other's learning. They use the recorded lectures for study and review.

Child Development Practitioner: The web lectures can be recorded for later reference and study. The program attracts students of all ages and learning experiences. Students appreciate the flexibility of learning and working at the same time.

Introducing Desire2Learn: In the fall of 2011, Desire2Learn was adopted by Canadore College. In the spring of 2011, faculty members from the same department attended the D2L training together so that they could share their issues and challenges, according to the content they are teaching. Many faculty members are ready to learn more about D2L and what it can offer to enhance learning and student engagement.

In a Business Mathematics class in fall 2011, students used iLearn to access webcast and recorded classroom activities, complete lesson packs with video recordings and self-assessments, and online quizzes and assignments. Feedback, although from a small sample, was positive about each component. The webcasts, live and recorded, were seen as "a good idea" and "makes getting caught up in class much more productive". All students found the lesson packs to be "important" or "very important" for student success. They appreciated the opportunity to re-do assignments online for better marks and a large majority benefitted from the online quizzes.

Students can register their mobile phones to get text or e-mail delivery of assignment notifications, news, discussions, grades, and other information through iLearn.

## Challenges and Enhancements

School of Sport and Recreation: Students studying online are responsible for arranging their own practical program components, such as tournament organization, with support and assistance from the College. Both faculty and students have to be careful to avoid distinctions among the student groups, as they are all attending class regardless of the format – there are no "second-class" students. Canadore's infrastructure also has to adapt to the three flexible cohorts. As students can choose their learning format each week, it is never clear how many students will be in the face-to-face class and what size the room should be to accommodate them.

Child Development Practitioner: Courses are offered via Contact North once a year. Therefore, students must plan ahead to make sure that they complete the required courses.

Introducing Desire2Learn: Controlling expectations is important, which is reflected in the minimum standards established for the roll-out. A careful implementation, tool by tool, accompanied by the appropriate pedagogy, is more likely to be successful than a push for the full capabilities of D2L. For example, Canadore has not yet invested in the e-portfolio and electronic classroom components on D2L, focusing on uses such as course content, communication, and assignments.

## Potential

School of Sport and Recreation: As the lectures and the course materials are available online, consideration is being given to offering continuous registration so that the students could work through the materials at their own pace. The flexibility of the delivery models is stimulating ideas around flexibility of assessment and evaluation. The model is currently being tested for delivery in Tobago to attract international students.

Child Development Practitioner: The courses that are currently being offered through correspondence will be moved to D2L for easier access and better interaction.

Introducing Desire2Learn: Among the possibilities for the next steps in the implementation of D2L are to have professors post lessons and course notes on the system. The use of D2L for testing is also being encouraged, with the development of test question libraries linked to learning objectives and course modules. The system can then create random and varied tests that can be used for assignments and self-assessment.

The faculty and staff at Canadore College are very open to talking with colleagues in other post-secondary institutions in Ontario about their models and programs and their use of online learning for enhancing student learning, access, and flexibility, as well as their experience with D2L.

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