

An LMS That Not Only Handles a Mixed-Learning Model but Is Helping to Advance It

Blackboard Learn Ultra provides access to a learning experience occurring anytime and anywhere, seamlessly integrating on-campus, online, and professional field learning for both learners and faculty.



UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES AND ARTS

PXL University of Applied Sciences and Arts was founded with the intention of playing a pioneering role in imparting new information and technology through education. Its professional competency focus is realized through a mixed-learning approach to education, incorporating on-campus, online, and professional fieldwork into the curriculum.

This unique learning model is intended to help each learner and staff member achieve what PXL refers to as the "X-factor." That X-factor is reached by growing skills across four areas: empassion (a combination of passion and empathy), innovative entrepreneurship, multidisciplinary, and international cooperation.

ABOUT PXL UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES AND ARTS

INSTITUTION TYPE:
FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC

LOCATION:
HASSELT, BELGIUM

POPULATION: 19,000

ANTHOLOGY PRODUCTS:

 **Blackboard LEARN**



The Challenges



PXL's mixed learning model results in such tremendous outcomes for their learners that it's become integral to achieving their X-factor. Yet, when the university began the search for an LMS that could function seamlessly across all three learning modalities, they were uncertain that any on the market were up to the task.

Learners, or "junior-colleagues" as PXL affectionately and rather professionally refers to them, undertake a curriculum that's accessed across multiple formats. The mixed learning philosophy of PXL requires learners to function successfully not just in the classroom but also online in a remote environment and in their practical on-the-job skills within a professional environment. As valuable as this practice is, it requires learners to be able to self-lead, and requires more work on the part of instructors to track student progress.

“Before [Learn] Ultra, our junior-colleagues told us it was difficult to use our LMS at points of their learning. We did not originally have a lot of confidence that the specific strategy we needed from an LMS could be realized.”



-Kristiaan Mesens, *Digital Learning Designer, PXL University of Applied Sciences and Arts*



“You can imagine that we needed an LMS that makes it possible to organize programs that are mixed. Courses online, courses in the professional field, and on our campus. So the LMS system has to be available anytime, anywhere, anyhow, with any device.”

-Kristiaan Mesens
*Digital Learning Designer
PXL University of Applied
Sciences and Arts*



The Solutions

PXL began its implementation of Blackboard® Learn Ultra in 2022 with an extraordinarily aggressive timeline. After selecting a few academic departments to pilot the switch, they set a goal of September 1, 2023, for complete migration to Learn Ultra.

The organizational structure at PXL was well suited to such an ambitious implementation schedule. The Information Communication Technology IN EDUCATION (ICTE) team consists of 20 members from 9 departments dedicated to the faculty of each department. The ICTE teams take their responsibility to support the organized educational workflows of the faculty seriously. And they set to work on 15 separate pilot implementations of Learn Ultra.



Insights Delivered



Seamless access across learning modalities:

Application access that was previously clunky and difficult for learners has become as easy for them as using any of their other preferred applications. For PXL, this isn't a case of making the lives of a secondary population of learners better—it has impacted its entire student population for the better.

Because every learner at PXL undergoes significant segments of remote learning and spends time in their professional field off campus, it's essential that they maintain uninterrupted access to the LMS. Using whatever device is most convenient in their learning environment, learners can access and utilize the full functionality of Learn Ultra.

Faculty focused on educating, not navigating: Just as Anthology strives to place educators at the forefront of product development, PXL believes in letting its educators focus on their best and highest work. One of Learn Ultra's distinct advantages for the university has been the fixed course view function.

Fixed course view standardizes the interface for course content, eliminating the need for faculty to spend time struggling with formatting the structure of their course delivery. And it removes any issues optimizing the course for participants using different devices.

“The educator has a focus on just one box, the content area. That's their focus, not the focus on structures at the left or on menus,” said Kristiaan Mesens, digital learning designer at PXL University of Applied Sciences and Arts. “And that's something really powerful. To allow the teacher to have something to focus on, and that's their expertise.”

But faculty feedback hasn't stopped there. Given the reality that a PXL student may be learning from anywhere in a self-led capacity, faculty can now track learner progress without barriers.

“In the work with self-based courses, students and educators can see what is happening in the professional field, online, or on campus. That educator has always the overview of where the student is in the course. And that's the first big advantage of [Learn] Ultra.”

-Kristiaan Mesens, Digital Learning Designer, PXL University of Applied Sciences and Arts

1,400
faculty

25,000
courses

IMPLEMENTED IN A SINGLE YEAR

An unprecedented implementation: Mesens explained what PXL sought to accomplish with its switch to Learn Ultra, “We had one simple goal. A difficult one. But one specific big goal. Full transition to [Learn] Ultra in one year. And we succeeded.”

Mesens had this to say to anyone considering implementing a new LMS, “My first advice, dare to jump.”

PXL recognized that migrating to something new would be a major challenge for the institution. But its philosophy is that any decision is better than indecision.

In the case of Learn Ultra, Mesens advises developing a solid implementation strategy with the input of all stakeholders. “My second advice is a lot of communication,” he said. PXL dedicated a significant amount of time to communicating what they needed to do prior to making the decision to implement Learn Ultra. PXL recognized the need for a change management plan to be brought into by the institution ahead of taking the jump.

The university also believes a central piece of its successful transformation was providing its faculty with a thorough understanding of the “why” behind the change. “Give your educators a good reason,” said Mesens, “a good strategy, a compass for the transition. And get their expectations, and give real answers to their expectations.”

In practice at PXL, this took the form of discussions with each faculty department about the upcoming project and constant communication—every two weeks—with progress updates during the implementation.

“We wanted to make it almost impossible to not know what was happening about [Learn] Ultra,” said Mesens.



What's Next

PXL's long-term goal is to create a university where every single course is available in a way that the learner can choose how they learn, asynchronously or synchronously—where a program is a great balance of the three dimensions to learn. Its vision for the use of Learn Ultra is to make mixed learning even more fundamental to the institution. They want to create each course with all of its facets completely accessible in any form—so that a learner can learn any course's material on campus, remotely online, or through practical applications in the professional field.

“That's maybe an ambitious goal to achieve,” Mesens said, “but I think we have to be ambitious. So if we can create a future where the student always has the opportunity to choose the way they want to learn, we can really call that an X-factor.”



A Shared Philosophy

Anthology and PXL agree on a fundamental part of the relationship between technology and education. Both organizations see keeping education immersed in the forefront of today's and tomorrow's technology as essential to their competitive edge. But that attitude comes with a deep respect for the human element of educational institutions. Allowing educators to focus on educating is central to PXL's and Anthology's strategies.

Educators like those at PXL will continue to inform the shape of Anthology's products, and it is that understanding that will allow Anthology to help educators focus on what they do best. That is, saving them from wrestling with poor UX or from wasting valuable time working around dysfunctional features.

“In a world that's becoming increasingly technological, we as humanity maybe need to become more human. And that's our X-factor. That every excellent professional always remains the expert. It's how we use technology that determines the value of it.”

-Kristiaan Mesens, *Digital Learning Designer, PXL University of Applied Sciences and Arts*



Hear more from Kristiaan Mesens at
anthology.com/pxl-university

Products highlighted in this success story:

 **Blackboard LEARN**



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