

The Rise of One of the Most Innovative Community Colleges in the Country

By implementing Blackboard® and emphasizing innovation, Morton College creates a learner experience that's so good, it's increased enrollment.



MORTON **MC** COLLEGE

Morton College is a public community college with over 5,400 students in Cicero, Illinois. Along with a proud, near-century-long heritage, Morton College aims to be one of the most innovative educational institutions in the United States.

The college's 174 faculty members educate a student population that is 84% Hispanic in 14 different degree programs and 36 professional certifications. As an institution, the college underwent an incredible transformation into online learning during the pandemic. And, in an industry that has experienced declining student numbers, Morton College has grown its enrollment over the same period.

INSTITUTION TYPE:
TWO-YEAR PUBLIC

LOCATION:
CICERO, ILLINOIS

POPULATION:
5,400

ANTHOLOGY PRODUCT:
Blackboard 

“The ROI of higher education is just not what it used to be for these students. They’re taking out these huge loans; they can’t pay them off. So, for me, community college is a very important space.”



—Dr. Nick Hryhorczuk,
Academic Director of Online Learning, Morton College



The Challenges

Community colleges in the United States have been navigating a difficult market for many years. While fulfilling an important role in the higher education space as a lower-cost alternative to four-year colleges and universities, they have started to be undercut by third-party players in similar spaces.

With the increasing prevalence of online learning, competition for online learners has become more saturated than ever. If community colleges can no longer compete for student enrollment on price, they must find other ways to distinguish themselves.



The Solutions

In 2019, Morton College operated fewer than 5% of its courses online. A year later, the institution quickly went 100% online in the midst of COVID-19. Implementing Blackboard® as their LMS was a major part of this unexpected transition—and continues to be a foundation of its long-term online learning strategy.

Dr. Nick Hryhorczuk, academic director of online learning at Morton College, believes that a community college must be tremendously innovative to differentiate itself in the marketplace. Morton needed an online learning environment that reflected the way it looked at education.

FROM **5%**
OF COURSES
ONLINE IN 2019
TO **100%**
ONLINE IN 2020





If a colleague asks me, 'Should I implement?' I would tell them it's a super easy decision. It is objectively the best learning management system on the market."

—Dr. Nick Hryhorczuk
Academic Director of Online Learning Morton College

Because of his role, Hryhorczuk is often questioned about LMS platforms by other institutions. "People ask me," Hryhorczuk said, "what's the best learning system on the market today?" And I tell them, objectively, [Blackboard] is the best compared to the others. But I tell them that they're asking the wrong question."

What is most important to Morton College is the shared philosophy between their institution and Anthology. "Under the Anthology umbrella," said Hryhorczuk, "the company is not just reacting to what's happening today. They're thinking about what's going to happen five, ten years from now."

Morton believes it can see that perspective reflected in how its LMS works. The future is seamlessly combining disparate data sets from a SIS, a CRM, and LMS—and leveraging that cohesive information to make decisions about tomorrow.



Insights Delivered

Speed, Consistency, and Adaptability Matter

It was important to Morton College that its learners have a clean interface for learning. Regardless of what course they were enrolled in, the user experience needed to be the same—allowing learners to spend less time worrying about where to find things and more time on absorbing the course content. Since different learners use different devices, the college also expected its LMS to function smoothly across mobile devices, tablets, and desktops and still have the same look and feel. "It's super clean. We find that it's really modern. It's also very fast, which is important. I love how fast it is. I also find that it's constantly upgrading," said Hryhorczuk.

Morton embraces a realistic understanding of what learners expect from the technology at their fingertips, and speed is central to that. A quick, responsive, cloud-based program was essential to ensuring that the educational technology that learners were using matched what they were familiar with in their personal lives.

"Whether we want to admit it or not, these students are looking at their courses on their phones, so we need to adapt to that."

—Dr. Nick Hryhorczuk
Academic Director of Online Learning Morton College





Enrollment is up about 7% for the fall. That's a part of our story. Students know being part of Morton College means being as innovative as possible, and the LMS is a big piece of that."

—Dr. Nick Hryhorczuk
Academic Director of Online Learning Morton College

Supporting First-Generation Learners

Morton College is, by percentage, the sixth-largest Hispanic-serving institution in the United States. It serves a large segment of first-generation college students from multi-generational households. This means that the students compete for both internet bandwidth and device time at home with family members.

The speed and connectivity of Blackboard's cloud platform are critical to those learners successfully accessing course content. The mobile-native, tablet-friendly interface is a tremendous advantage for this student population.

Preparing Learners for Modern Careers

Hryhorczuk stresses how incredibly important it is to Morton College that learners get comfortable with modern technology. "They're going to see it in the field. The jobs that are out there, they're constantly evolving," he said. Morton's educational philosophy insists on its learners using modern software. If it's going to be important in the careers of learners, it's important in the college's eyes to prepare them for it.

Sparking Enrollment Growth

Staying glued to the forefront of modern, innovative technology isn't just a point of pride for Morton College—it's part of its business strategy. Enrollment at four-year colleges and universities has been slipping for over a decade. Morton's positioning as a community college aims to take advantage of that with innovation as its edge.

Using platforms like Blackboard attracts a strong faculty group and—they believe—has served to grow student enrollment. "The students love [Blackboard]. We've seen growth in enrollment with the online programs. So we're really excited about the work we've done on that online experience," said Hryhorczuk.

"The students love [Blackboard]."



—Dr. Nick Hryhorczuk
Academic Director of Online Learning Morton College



What's Next

Hryhorczuk tells the story describing how he first got involved with the implementation of Blackboard. “My customer experience manager didn’t just phone it in. He came to our campus, and it was really a conversation,” Hryhorczuk said.

Anthology believes strongly in understanding customers’ learners, faculty, and staff, and the culture of an institution before making recommendations on changes. “They really listened to the feedback that I was providing, and I thought it really was a team effort in determining what was the best strategy for us,” said Hryhorczuk.

“We’re super excited about our partnership with Anthology. Ensuring that we’re working with an innovative partner in the space is incredibly important to us. It’s important for enrollment issues, it’s important for retention, it’s important for careers.”



—Dr. Nick Hryhorczuk,
Academic Director of Online Learning, Morton College



Hear more from Dr. Nick Hryhorczuk at
anthology.com/morton-college

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Blackboard 

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