



# Oral Roberts University: Shaping Tomorrow's Leaders with Innovative Digital Learning

Oral Roberts University creates leaders of the future by delivering game-changing student experiences online and on-campus.

*Learning is about more than just the mind, and the most effective educational institutions address students' mind, body and spirit. Oral Roberts University worked with D2L to integrate heart-rate monitoring, virtual and augmented reality, robotic telepresence and artificial intelligence technologies with learning management—helping it to boost student retention and post-graduation success rates.*

## AT A GLANCE

**Student Number:** 4,600

### Interviewee:

- Michael Mathews, Vice President of Innovation and Technology, Oral Roberts University



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*Michael Mathews, VP of Innovation and Technology, ORU*

## **SUMMARY**

To help students on campus and around the world get the most out of learning, Oral Roberts University is leveraging the latest technology and research. By empowering students to immerse themselves in their studies using virtual reality technology and telepresence robots, the University is improving outcomes and saving time for faculty and administrators.

## **QUICK FACTS**

- 900 hours saved on manual data entry through integration of FitBit devices with learning management system
- 95% student retention rate for Fall Freshman to Fall Spring
- 11 consecutive years of increased enrollment
- Optimizes student outcomes while minimizing change impact for faculty
- Ranked 4th in the Nation on Student Engagement by 2020 Wall Street Journal/Times Higher Education College Rankings
- 99.4% student placement rate post-graduation
- U.S. News and World Report has ranked Oral Roberts University as the #1 Best Value School and a Best in the West in its Regional College rankings

## **OPENING UP ACCESS TO SUPERB EDUCATION**

At Oral Roberts University (ORU), embracing innovation is the norm rather than the exception. ORU does not limit its focus to academics. Instead, the university aims to expand the mind, body and spirit of students to help them maintain a high level of achievement post-graduation.

ORU is also committed to enabling access to higher education to people all around the world. Michael Mathews, Vice President for Innovation and Technology, explains: “Our goal is to be able to connect to students in all 195 countries globally. Five years ago, we were at 75 countries—since I joined, we’ve increased that number to 114.”

To help students reach their full potential whether they are on-campus or on the other side of the world, ORU is always looking for innovative ways to harness new technologies. The university aims to target its investments where they will have the most impact on students, without increasing the burden on faculty.

“We want to provide students a path to a rounded education,” comments Michael Mathews. “We can introduce exciting new modes of teaching such as virtual reality and telepresence robots, but we also have to make them easy to log in and use. Equally, we want our faculty to focus on what they do



best—teaching—rather than constantly having to adapt to new processes and tools. Our key challenge is integrating new innovations into existing systems so that both our students and faculty can work to the best of their abilities.”

#### **BUILDING ON A SOLID FOUNDATION**

To bring together its data-driven student services, Oral Roberts University relies on D2L’s Brightspace learning management system.

“We are a pioneer of polysynchronous learning: the integration of face-to-face education with both synchronous and asynchronous online teaching,” says Michael Mathews. “Brightspace plays an integral role in our ability to offer digital courses and learning materials seamlessly, which is vital for our online students. We see Brightspace as a world-leading LMS, and our students and faculty alike have embraced the platform.”

Oral Roberts University uses its LMS to enable many of its digital services. For example, the organization is using the D2L solution to automatically capture students’ FitBit data at the end of each semester, allowing students to see the credits they’ve earned based on their physical activity.

“Our vision of learning is to help students become whole-person leaders, which means training the mind, spirit and body,” explains Michael Mathews. “Research over the course of 50 years has demonstrated that students who walk 10,000 to 12,000 steps per day score two GPA points higher than those who are less active—so exercise is a key component of our curriculum. To receive credits for exercise, our students walk 10,000 steps and measure their heart rate three times per day using FitBit.”

In the past, students would send their FitBit data to a faculty member at the end of the semester, who would then enter that data into the LMS and student information system. To cut out this manual work, Oral Roberts University created a direct integration between FitBit’s online portal and Brightspace.

“Our integration between the SIS and our LMS means students can receive their grades faster. Crucially, we save faculty about 900 hours of manual labor per semester by taking the digital data directly from the Fitbit service; and another 400 hours by integrating the grades in D2L and the SIS system.”

*Michael Mathews, VP of Innovation and Technology,  
Oral Roberts University*





*“Digital, self-service capabilities from the Brightspace platform play a vital role in taking the load off of our faculty’s shoulders and helping them provide a high-quality education with extensive engagement to every student.”*

*Michael Mathews, VP of Innovation and Technology, ORU*

### **IMPROVING STUDENT HEALTH AND WELLBEING**

The Brightspace platform also feeds into digital innovations around the student health and wellbeing at Oral Roberts University. By combining data from the LMS with artificial intelligence and digital assistant technologies, the university has created a mental health concept named MQ Mirror—an interactive experience that will help students reduce stress and stay in control of their learning.

“We’ve deployed smart mirrors with interactive displays in select areas across the university,” continues Michael Mathews. “Students and faculty can ask the mirror to give them an overview of their current course progress, content within the course or even connect them to any service on campus.”

“The ability to gain a clear overview of what a student needs to focus on to realize their potential is a powerful tool: it helps them stay on top of their studies while striking a good balance between exercise and social activities. MQ Mirror is starting to make an important contribution toward the well-being of the students, and the data from Brightspace plays an important role.”

*Michael Mathews, VP of Innovation and Technology,  
Oral Roberts University*

### **BRINGING ONLINE LEARNERS CLOSER**

With 600 students studying online in addition to its 4,000 students on campus, Oral Roberts University is harnessing the latest in virtual reality and robotic telepresence solutions to enable every learner to play an active role in university life.

“We’ve augmented our course materials on Brightspace with more than 700,000 virtual reality and augmented reality environments, which students can access and explore in their own time to gain a deeper understanding of the topics they’re being taught in the classroom.”

*Michael Mathews, VP of Innovation and Technology,  
Oral Roberts University*

Even online students who are thousands of miles away from our campus can participate in the classroom as if they were there, thanks to telepresence robots. Using a smartphone, a student in Nigeria can control a human-sized robot outfitted with cameras and video display in a classroom at the university—enabling them to interact with their teachers and peers as if they were there in the room.

“The idea is to empower students to take control of their education while minimizing the change management and effort required by faculty to manage these types of advanced technologies in the classroom.”



### SHAPING TOMORROW'S LEADERS

With digital services for students and faculty supported by D2L, Oral Roberts University is helping learners cultivate the skills they need to become well-rounded leaders.

“We’ve been offering augmented and virtual reality learning resources for three years now, and these technologies have already made a big difference,” says Michael Mathews.

“Our student retention rate jumped from 63 to 95 percent in measured areas, and the proportion of students being awarded work placements shot up from 84 percent to 99.4 percent. Enabling our students to experience mock interview scenarios in virtual reality has played a crucial role in this success.”

*Michael Mathews, VP of Innovation and Technology,  
Oral Roberts University*

In a recent study, Oral Roberts University found that its graduates will earn an average of \$2.5 million more over the course of a lifetime than people who don't have a degree, clearly demonstrating the value of the university's approach to the learning experience.

“We are trying to produce solid, whole-person leaders, and the glowing feedback we're receiving from the businesses that interview and hire our graduates gives us the confidence that we're achieving that goal,” adds Michael Mathews.

With 11 consecutive years of growth in student enrollment across the country, Oral Roberts University is going from strength to strength—and its Brightspace platform continues to provide a solid foundation for its students and teachers.

“Our promise to the faculty is: we will do everything in our power to ensure you can focus on teaching,” concludes Michael Mathews. “Digital, self-service capabilities from the Brightspace platform play a vital role in taking the load off of our faculty's shoulders and helping them provide a high-quality education with extensive engagement to every student.”