HPE GreenLake

A resilient learning environment that flexes

Saskatchewan Polytechnic is better prepared with a secure, hybrid cloud strategy

A catalyst for the province's economy, Saskatchewan Polytechnic provides students with the skills they need to succeed in the workforce. To enhance the education experience and respond to business demands, the school needed to evolve. A digital transformation — accelerated by unplanned events — led to building a more flexible and resilient environment with simplified operations, reduced costs, and higher availability.

Fostering growth, breaking barriers

Saskatchewan Polytechnic plays a crucial role in the community it serves. "We're a catalyst for economic growth," says Gwen Bourque, associate vice president of information technology services. "We partner with the industry and equip people with the skills they need, getting them out into the workforce with relevant knowledge."

The institute delivers a wide range of post-secondary training and programs structured around the province's specific needs.

As the demands and opportunities of the digital era evolve, so has the polytechnic's approach to education. "We have a philosophy of 'work from anywhere, learn from anywhere'," shares Bourque, "Our digital platform allows us to break down all those barriers."

The drive for transformation

Whether it's enabling student collaboration, powering virtual labs, or running its enterprise resource planning (ERP) system for higher education, Saskatchewan Polytechnic relies on its technology environment in its mission to foster qualified students. "If you get it wrong, it impacts everything: the students, the learning environment, and the faculty," Bourque explains.

SASKATCHEWAN POLYTECHNIC

Industry: Higher education
Country: Canada

Vision

Empower the community through applied education and research that enable learner and employer success

Strategy

Build a resilient digital platform that supports future-focused learning and career development

Outcomes

- Enhances student and staff experiences with faster, always-on systems and services
- Optimizes resources through predictable costs and full visibility of environment and usage
- Supports IT governance and disaster recovery strategy, positioning as a regional security leader

She has seen those impacts. And because of that, she led her team to build a more resilient environment. When two unplanned events put systems to the test, the digital transformation that was already in motion shifted to full speed. "We had a three-year strategy plan in place, but then we had a cyber incident, and we had the pandemic, so that expedited the transformation," says Bourque. "Now we can come back a lot better if anything were to happen again."

Within a year, Saskatchewan Polytechnic had the technology it needed to provide always-on learning, adapt to evolving needs, and recover faster from any unplanned challenges.

Response and recovery

Bourque was the director of operations when the cyber incident happened. "All our virtual machines were turning red one by one," she recalls. "I knew what was happening, but I didn't want to admit it. It was scary."

Recovering was a massive effort involving vendors, third-party consultants, and internal teams. "Our emergency response team kicked in immediately, and it was fantastic — If you don't have an emergency response plan, I highly recommend getting it in place now," she warns.

Getting all the systems up and running again took several weeks. Once fully recovered, Bourque and her team focused on creating a secure and up to date environment: "Legacy systems, hardware, and software are not worth the risk at all."

Their efforts yielded results, running smoother operations and delivering digital services anytime faculty or students need them. In 2023, World Federation of Colleges and Polytechnics awarded Saskatchewan Polytechnic for its cyber and data security.

The journey to hybrid cloud

Bourque could already see what the next-generation solution should look like: "We needed to build a resilient environment. We needed high availability, as well as scalability." Hybrid cloud was the way to go, and Saskatchewan Polytechnic chose the HPE GreenLake edge-to-cloud platform as one of the core components of its highly adaptable environment. "We went with the HPE GreenLake platform because it offered us so much flexibility."

One unique path, two outstanding careers

A Saskatchewan Polytechnic alum herself, Gwen Bourque has blazed a trail in two fields where women have little representation: IT and the military. "I joined the military in grade 12," Bourque recalls. "At the time, it was just going to be a job to get me through school, but I absolutely loved it."

She's navigated both careers with determination, taking the leadership and strategy skills she acquired in the forces into her work at the polytechnic. "My journeys in military and civilian forces have always gone hand in hand as I've gone through progressively more challenging roles," she says.

In fact, while planning and implementing Saskatchewan Polytechnic's digital transformation, Bourque made her way up the military ranks. In 2022, she was promoted to Brigadier General, overseeing more than 10,000 Canadian Armed Forces members.

Bourque shares her insight for other women working in IT: "Let go of perfectionism and just be progressive. Get comfortable being uncomfortable. Make mistakes and learn from them. I got here today with my open attitude — talking to my team and leaning on them. If they see you believe in their expertise, they will support you along the way."

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The institute's HPE GreenLake for Private Cloud Business Edition solution features HPE Alletra dHCI with HPE ProLiant Gen10 servers, HPE Synergy, and HPE SimpliVity. It delivers simplified operations with an intuitive cloud operational experience, seamless integration to public cloud, and built-in backup capabilities that contribute to the goal of reinforcing security.

"The HPE GreenLake platform really helped us modernize our environment," Bourque shares an example. "When we had issues with our virtual desktop infrastructure environment, we were able to scale up very quickly and create a new environment on HPE GreenLake to make sure we could provide a resilient service, so the students didn't have downtime in their labs."

Smarter, smoother operations

With greater visibility and centralized management, the solution simplifies the polytechnic's environment. "We can see where all our workloads are, whether it's in a data center, in Azure, or AWS. We can see it all — that has really simplified things," says Bourque.

She also finds value in the intelligent operations of the HPE GreenLake platform: "It can predict if you have a workload that's in trouble and automate the transfer to the cloud and keep that service up and running, that's huge for us. We never had that in the past."

This translates to a better experience for students, faculty, and staff, who get access to every application, with better performance and no interruption.

Reducing risks and costs

Saskatchewan Polytechnic now gets greater cost predictability with the HPE GreenLake platform. "I can deliver my operating and capital plans with a lot of fidelity and reduce those costs because we're only paying for what we use," Bourque says.

With the option to quickly expand and add new resources, the institute reduces the risk and cost of overprovisioning.

When looking for a new environment to house its Banner ERP system, Bourque's team did a cost analysis across several vendors: "Costs from HPE GreenLake are a quarter of the price, so that's the strategy we're going with."

Raising the bar

Security is an ongoing mission, and Bourque is leading the charge with initiatives such as establishing an IT governance group, implementing protocols and business continuity plans, updating the environment, and, most importantly, strengthening her team through recruitment, retainment, and constant training.

Saskatchewan Polytechnic is now a model for security, helping other institutions implement policies and procedures.

The HPE GreenLake platform is an important tool for Bourque and team to support an enhanced, always-on learning experience. "I'm very comfortable with HPE GreenLake. I can sleep at night," she states.

"Now, we're really focused on disaster recovery plans and how to achieve better recovery point objective times," she continues. "I will be very excited when we get to the point where we can recover our entire data center within a day or two. I know it's possible."

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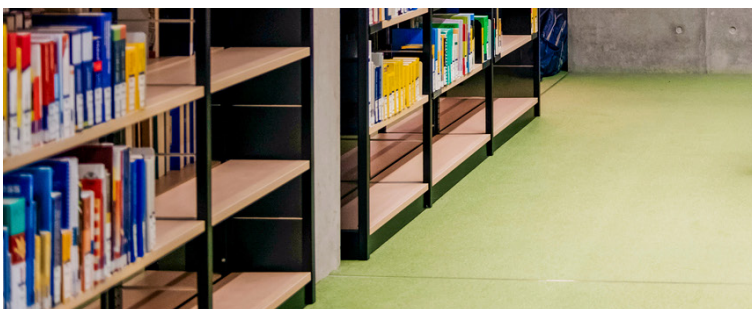
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Hardware

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