

CASE STUDY

STATE COLLEGE OF FLORIDA MANATEE-SARASOTA

Connect and SmartBook Tutors Students to Improve Grades by an Average of 10 Points

Professor Kittrell requires her students to use *Connect* and *SmartBook* because the learning tool “tutors” students at their various levels of understanding and works as a study aid to help students improve their grades. Kittrell has seen her students’ grades increase by an average of 10 points since she started to require the students to complete homework assignments in *Connect*: “Students love the interactivity of the program and can be highly engaged with the course material using *Connect* and *SmartBook*. I can’t think of a situation where you wouldn’t see great results for your students.”

Institution Profile

The State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota, was established in 1957 and is dedicated to providing the educational and workforce training needs for students in the area. More than 10,000 students enrolled in the fall of 2013 at the Bradenton, Lakewood Ranch, and Venice campuses and for online classes. Bachelor and Associate degrees are available in Science and Applied Science, and Certificates and Advanced Technical Certificates are offered. Nearly 42,000 degrees have been earned since 1960.

Implementation

Course Description:

This course is an introduction to the scientific study of human behavior with emphasis on the processes of thinking and learning as the basis for individual adjustment to the physical and social environment.

Course Grade:

The grade is determined by the following:

40% - *Connect* (Quizzes and *SmartBook* Homework)

60% - Exams

Digital Product in Use:

Connect® Psychology

Course Name:

PSY 2012 General Psychology

Course Type:

Online

Credit Hours:

3 hours

Textbook in Use:

The Science of Psychology: An Appreciative View by Laura King, 3rd ed.

Instructor Name:

Cheri Kittrell

Enrollment:

9 sections; 25-30 students/
section; 2,658 students/year
(university total)

Case Study Term:

Spring 2013 and Spring 2014

“The time saved grading and lecture prep is well worth the time spent to learn the technology for both you and your students.”

- Cheri Kittrell



Implementation of McGraw-Hill *Connect Psychology*

Before Professor Kittrell implemented *Connect* in 2008, she was using a “piecemeal” approach and grading assignments mostly by hand. Kittrell says, “The criteria we used to choose *Connect* was (1) we wanted a product we knew we could use to cover the learning objectives as established by the State of Florida, (2) we wanted a tool we could use to engage the students with the material and one that the students would use, and (3) we wanted to reduce the costs to the students in any way we could.”

Since the spring of 2009, *Connect* has been required for all of the Psychology courses at SCF. “*Connect* is required because we want students to use *Connect* as a study aid to help students improve their grades.” Kittrell assigns one chapter per week. The students are asked to read the chapter, complete a *SmartBook* assignment, and take a quiz on the material.

On the first day of class, Kittrell walks through *SmartBook* with the students and narrates herself using *SmartBook*. She encourages the students to read the chapter first and then complete the homework. “Often,” Kittrell says, “students try to do it the other way around. I try to convince them that they will actually get through the homework faster if they take the time to read the assignment first.”

When introducing *Connect* and *SmartBook* to the students, Kittrell advises, “Your attitude toward the technology will transmit to the students. If you are excited, the students will be excited. I tell the students, ‘*Connect* and *SmartBook* is the best thing that will ever happen to your grade.’”

Students complete the *SmartBook* assignments in an average of one hour and 20 minutes. Quizzes are usually 20 questions and can take 90 minutes to complete. Kittrell wants students to use the quizzes as learning opportunities to apply what they’ve learned in class.

Before using *Connect*, Kittrell started each lecture with questions about the last lecture and she was met with “the blank faces of students who didn’t understand” the previous materials. Now, Kittrell uses the *Connect* reports to see exactly what content the students don’t know. Kittrell says, “I couldn’t live without the Item Analysis report. I use it to see exactly why the students feel lost. I save about 20 minutes of class each day because I don’t have to drag out of students what they don’t know.”

Kittrell also uses the Student Performance and the At-Risk reports for individual student counseling because she likes to help the students before they get too far behind in their studies. She notes that some of her students don’t come to campus “college ready,” and many of the students struggle with reading. *Connect* provides learning opportunities to help these students with the areas that they struggle with the most. “*SmartBook* is like a tutor who is sitting there with them to help. It meets students at their level and helps them to reach goals despite the challenges they are facing.”

Additionally, *Connect* helps Kittrell provide documentation for accreditation with the State of Florida. She matches the Learning Objectives that are required by the State to the Learning Objectives in *Connect* and is able to easily provide data on how well the students are achieving and learning content. Kittrell notes, “*Connect* is incredibly useful for the accreditation process because the reports give us an opportunity to share data among faculty and staff, and we are able to tweak the material to improve grades to meet Learning Objectives set out for us by the State of Florida.”

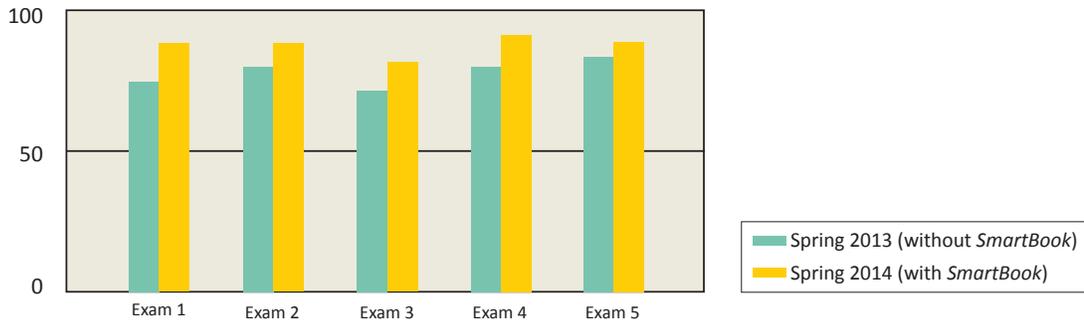
Results Achieved

Because *Connect* forces the students to read the materials, Kittrell is able to use more class time for student questions and use examples to delve “deeper into the meat of the course’s content.” The animations and demonstrations in *Connect* make the content interactive and engaging for the students.

Students appreciate the interactivity. One student commented, “I enjoy the *SmartBook* program online. The questions mixed with the reading makes studying a lot easier.” Another student said, “I especially like how in-depth *SmartBook* was. I learned so much detail that I almost felt like I was in science class.”

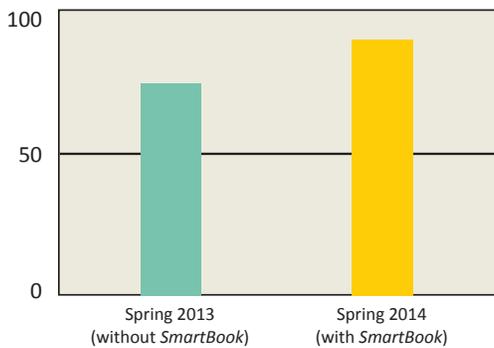
The results confirm that student grades improve: From Spring 2013 without *SmartBook* to Spring 2014 with *SmartBook*, student scores were consistently higher (Figure 1).

Figure 1 - Average Student Grades by Section



Kittrell likes giving students the opportunity to moderate their own learning. “*SmartBook* gives students the help they need in time management and learning skills.” As a result, she’s seen huge improvements in her students’ performances: “I’ve seen an enormous jump in the class averages – close to 10 points!” (Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Overall Average Student Grade



Kittrell believes the jump in grades is due to the interactivity of *SmartBook*. “Students are highly engaged with technology and thus can be highly engaged with the course material using *SmartBook*. Students can actually enjoy their homework.”

Further, she no longer needs to manually grade homework or quizzes. Kittrell appreciates that she now has “more time to interact with students because she could spend forever grading in previous semesters.” She likes that both she and her students get instant feedback on course materials so there is an opportunity to improve what they’re doing immediately.

Kittrell looks forward to using different assignments and different quizzes to help meet the students where they are in their levels of preparedness for college learning. She plans on incorporating additional videos, animations, and web articles to provide more opportunities to learn the content in an engaging way. “*Connect* is the platform that allows us to meet the students’ needs wherever their needs might be. We are able to be adaptable. I can’t think of a situation where you wouldn’t see great results for your students.”

“With Connect and SmartBook, I can identify and address in lecture why some students might feel lost in the material.”

Conclusion

Kittrell believes SmartBook tutors her students to improve their grades by engaging her students in the course content in an interactive and meaningful way. She no longer faces the “blank stares” of students who didn’t understand the homework. Instead, students say, “I especially like how in-depth SmartBook was” and “I have learned so much from Connect this semester.” The students’ grades prove those results – improving by an average of 10 points!