



Sandra McClammy

Instructor of English and Humanities — Cape Fear Community College

Aplia™ Helps Nontraditional Students Get Comfortable with Online Learning

Sandra McClammy has been teaching in the English Department at Cape Fear Community College since 2007. In addition to on-campus and online hybrid English classes, she also teaches a critical thinking course in the Humanities Department. In her hybrid English class, Sandra finds that the biggest challenges are getting nontraditional students familiar and comfortable with the online software applications that are required in the course, and managing her workload so she can make the most of her time.

COURSES AND PARTICIPANTS

Sandra sets her class up by units and weeks and says she likes to connect independent study to the applications. “At the beginning of the week, I assign them the digital chapter to read, and the learning objectives. Then we go over them in class and will try the actual exercises on Aplia. I like to send the students out on their own to read the chapter and practice, and then I actually give the lecture and make a connection that way. Then I send them back out again to do another problem set.” As is common in many community colleges, Sandra’s classes are comprised of a mix of traditional students and older, nontraditional students who may not be as computer literate or accustomed to online learning.

THE CHALLENGES

The biggest challenge for many of Sandra’s students is getting accustomed to the online course components. With older, returning students in particular, she says, “it’s kind of a challenge because, first of all, the class is already a hybrid.” She tries up front to make students understand that, as a hybrid course, there is a significant amount of work required to be done online. But, she says, “...some of my nontraditional students...they don’t really want change. They kind of get stuck in doing something one way and not really wanting to change a habit.” But offering hybrid classes and helping students adapt to online learning is something Sandra firmly believes in. “It’s just the way of the world,” she says. “I mean, more and more things are technological...there’s so many things—as far as technology and computer applications—in our future, that hybrid courses prepare students for that.”

Her own biggest challenge is managing her workload and finding ways to maximize her time. “I’m very productive. I don’t like what I call ‘wasting’ a lot of time.” Accordingly, she’s always looking for ways that she can increase that productivity, so she can get more done in less time, without sacrificing efficiency.

CHALLENGES

- **Nontraditional students are reluctant to embrace online learning**, which is required for successful completion of the course.
- **Instructors struggle to balance their workload and boost productivity.**

SOLUTIONS

- Aplia
- *Fusion: Integrated Reading and Writing, Book 1*, by Kemper, Meyer, Van Rys, and Sebranek

RESULTS

- **Aplia lets students work at their own pace**, from their own homes, and provides them with an intuitive interface that helps increase their comfort level in using technology for learning.
- **Aplia grades automatically** and flows directly to the instructor grade book, freeing up instructors’ time so they can be more productive and make the most of their time.

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THE RESULTS

After only 2 semesters using Aplia, Sandra has already seen a boost in her own productivity. For instance, instead of having to write practice sentences on the whiteboard by hand prior to working them in class, she likes that she can simply open the book in Aplia, projected on the board, and work the sentence that's already there. “So that sentence is already written for me,” she says, adding that it greatly increases her productivity. Because it is easier to learn and use than other online homework products she's tried, Aplia saves her time up front as well. “When it comes to software applications like that, it's almost like I have to be 150% ahead of my students in learning the software and understanding it,” says Sandra. “The worst thing you can do is have a student ask you, ‘Well, how am I supposed to do the assignment and submit it?’ and you can't even answer.” And of course, Aplia's automatic grading saves her even more time. “It's not another piece of paper I've got to collect. It grades itself, and there again, [cuts] workload in half.”

Sandra also believes that Aplia helps nontraditional students become more comfortable with online learning tools. Using Aplia, she says, “gives students a technological edge.... It's a teaching tool for what I call ‘future technology,’ to the point that maybe we will end up where we won't have textbooks at all. Everything will be digital.”

Sandra has also noticed an improvement in students' comprehension and grades and credits Aplia with making learning more effective and fun. “It takes students through some tutorials, in addition to the digital textbook, giving them the explanation. It gives them the explanation again in the assignment, and then it allows them to practice it. So I think that reinforces them and allows them to make better grades.” Plus, she says, “the variety [of] the questions and the way the questions are set up, to me seemed a little bit more fun for the students.”

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