



Bea Talpos, PhD

Instructor of American Government — Wayne County Community College

Aplia™ Prompts Students to Think Critically About American Government

You might think that someone who has taught political science and American Government for more years than she “cares to admit to” would be slow to adapt to new technology, but that isn’t the case with Bea Talpos. Bea, who teaches for Wayne County Community College District in Detroit, Michigan, saw the value of online learning 15 years ago and helped the district get its online program off the ground. Since then, she has learned what online tools work, and what doesn’t, and Aplia™ is a solution she places soundly in the “works” category.

COURSES AND PARTICIPANTS

Each of Bea’s five online introductory American Government sections has more than 30 students. It’s a diverse group ethnically, socio-economically, and academically, and includes traditional college-age students and those who have been out of school for years. Most students take the course to satisfy a general education requirement. “I have had students who were working on doctorates and discovered that they needed the intro class, so the range of proficiency runs the gamut from those who have very, very poor study skills to those who have excellent skills,” says Bea.

THE CHALLENGES

Bea’s challenges are similar to those faced by many instructors; for instance. “Many of the students just want to get American Government over with so that they can continue with the coursework related to their major or primary area of interest,” says Bea. “I also have many students with poor reading and study skills. Academic deficiencies, especially for a course like American Government that requires critical thinking, can intensify students’ anxiety and reticence.” Finally, many of Bea’s students are stretched thin with part-time or full-time jobs and families, in addition to taking a full course load.

The Results

Aplia sparks students’ critical reading and thinking, and that’s exactly why Bea thinks it’s ideal for American Government. Interactive, chapter-specific problems ensure that students are reading their textbook, learning concepts, and practicing their application.

“Political science courses require students to evaluate information and think analytically, and so does Aplia,” she says. “Students must have a good understanding of the textbook material to respond correctly, but the questions aren’t the type for which they can just look up answers. Aplia requires students to put some thought into their conclusions. For instance, they answer questions based on case scenarios, interpret graphs, and evaluate political cartoons.” Aplia problems also include video clips and articles featuring recent

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CHALLENGES

- **Students often need stronger study habits**, which would enable them to complete the necessary reading and homework.
- **Remediating poor reading and study skills** is beyond the purview of instructors’ responsibilities, yet struggling students need extra support.
- **Assessing critical thinking skills** typically requires time-intensive creation and grading of written assignments.

SOLUTIONS

- Aplia
- Janda, Kenneth, Jeffrey M. Berry, Jerry Goldman, & Kevin W. Hula, *Cengage Advantage Books: The Challenge of Democracy, Essentials: American Government in Global Politics*

RESULTS

- **Aplia’s interactive exercises actively involve students**, in their own learning. Questions are visually engaging and require students to analyze information and apply key concepts. Exercises also include material about current events to spark students’ interest.
- **Students receive immediate, detailed feedback** for every answer. Students can repeat different versions of problems, which encourages them to revisit the material and consequently helps them boost their comprehension.
- **Aplia’s interactive exercises help to strengthen students’ comprehensive reading and critical thinking skills.** Grades are automatically recorded in the instructor’s Aplia gradebook, saving instructors time.

“Aplia simplifies my assessment, because if students perform well on the assignments I know that they understand the material and are actively reflecting on it.”

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political events that enhance engagement with textbook learning objectives as well as data analysis questions that promote statistical literacy.

Bea also sees the benefits of Aplia’s interactivity, which actively involves students in learning the material. “As students work through problem sets, they can have each problem graded, receive relevant information when they make a mistake, and then try it again. Students find the idea of being able to have another chance appealing,” she says. Bea allows students up to three attempts at each problem. Each attempt generates a different version of the question while the learning points stay the same, thereby reinforcing text concepts.

“Aplia really rewards time on task. It isn’t boring — it really does present interesting scenarios in the questions,” says Bea. She remembers one student who was initially frustrated because Aplia wasn’t easy for her. “She kept at it and soon concluded that Aplia was wonderful. She wished that she had something like Aplia for all of her classes, because she saw that being willing to do the work allowed her to succeed. You can’t fake it with Aplia. You have to invest the time, and that’s what I like about it.”

Bea says that students who commit to Aplia perform better in the course than online students in the non-Aplia years — their engagement and understanding improves, and ultimately their grades. Grades flow directly into the Aplia gradebook as students complete their assignments, allowing instructors to easily monitor performance.

Before Aplia, Bea used open-book quizzes to determine if students were reading, and writing assignments to evaluate their analytical thinking. “Students still have written assignments, but I don’t have to create and grade as many of them as in the past to determine if they are really thinking because Aplia’s assignments are geared that way,” she says. “Aplia simplifies my assessment, because if students perform well on the assignments I know that they understand the material and are actively reflecting on it.” Instructors are also able to assign questions in Aplia that require students to think critically.

Cengage Learning is always available to help when Bea needs it. “I have worked with the representative assigned to me by Cengage Learning, who is wonderful. I really have had excellent support.”

Wayne County Community College District
Detroit, Michigan



Source Code: 13L-AG0680



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