



Tamra Ortgies-Young,

Instructor – Political Science, Social Sciences Department

Georgia Perimeter College, Dunwoody Campus (Atlanta metro area)

Aplia™ Boosts Student Engagement—and Success—in Introductory Political Science Course

An involved and enthusiastic instructor, Tamra Ortgies-Young teaches American Government, Global Issues, and Introduction to Public Administration—plus a first-year seminar with a political science theme—at the Dunwoody campus of Georgia Perimeter College.

Tamra adopted Aplia for her Political Science 1101 course in the fall of 2012 and is finding it very helpful in increasing engagement and making it easier for her students to adhere to the schedule she has set for the course. “The fact that Aplia can be set up so that it fits with the learning regimen I have established is really great. It’s important to me to make sure that students get involved from the beginning of the class and quickly develop healthy study habits.”

COURSES AND PARTICIPANTS

Tamra currently teaches an average of four sections of Political Science 1101 per semester. Classes are taught in honors, face to face, online or hybrid formats, and each section is comprised of up to 35 students—for a census of some 140 people in one course alone. Balancing this teaching load with other courses, it is essential for her to be efficient with her time. She notes that Aplia has made teaching introductory American Government significantly easier. “I really appreciate the dedicated Cengage Learning people who are an integral part of using Aplia. They set up my sections each semester and provide excellent technical support. That saves me an enormous amount of time.”

Georgia Perimeter College is an Associate Degree-granting college of the Georgia university system and has six locations in the Atlanta metro area. It serves a diverse population. Many of Tamra’s students are from different cultures, do not speak English as a first language, and are new immigrants to this country. A significant percentage of her students are from disadvantaged economic circumstances and finance their educations largely through financial aid.

THE CHALLENGES

Tamra is quick to say that her biggest challenge is capturing her students’ attention and keeping them engaged. Quite apart from the time they devote to their education, most of her students have other obligations such as work and child-rearing. As she puts it, “The students who take my classes have a lot going on. Education is not their sole focus, and engagement is an issue.”

continued

CHALLENGES

- **Students often have very full schedules.** They are balancing work, family life, and school. Getting them engaged in coursework is critical to their ability to be successful academically.
- **Time management is a big issue,** and Aplia has made it easier for students to keep up with the class schedule, while allowing them to tackle assignments at a convenient time.
- **Students lack study skills and academic preparation,** and Aplia helps them compensate by motivating them to work steadily throughout a semester.

SOLUTIONS

- Aplia™
- Bardes, Shelley II, and Schmidt, American Government and Politics Today: Essentials

RESULTS

- **The constant challenge offered by homework assignments and instant feedback** of online grading has helped students improve their scores and increase their perception of success.
- **Aplia strengthens critical thinking and an understanding of basic political science concepts** through its interactive approach and sense of real-time participation.
- **Assignments that are enriched with visual materials, tutorials, and videos** make the learning experience more varied and interesting, increasing engagement and the motivation to continue.

“Aplia assignment deadlines keep students on task. Certainly there is greater retention, and students seem to be fully engaged in the course. In fact, Aplia promotes their engagement.”

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With the ability to schedule homework and due dates in Aplia, Tamra believes that it has become easier for students to keep up with weekly assignments, rather than simply studying for an exam at the last minute. “Aplia has been great in helping them to manage their time more effectively. If my students worked only from a standard textbook...they might be cramming for exams and not really absorbing the information. Aplia keeps them on track.”

A lack of solid study skills is also a challenge. As an access institution, Georgia Perimeter accepts students from a variety of academic backgrounds. Some are better prepared than others. “Quality enhancement is an important program at Georgia Perimeter,” says Tamra. “We really want to help students, and I am always on the lookout for tools that will give them the boost they need and the experience of success that will keep them motivated.”

THE RESULTS

In Tamra’s eyes, the ability to schedule assignments and more easily hold students accountable for completing them is a big bonus. She also believes that online grading and instantaneous feedback is invaluable in keeping students moving ahead. “Once my students get accustomed to Aplia—and it doesn’t take long—they really like it. After I make an assignment, they can work whenever they have the time -- for example, early in the morning before work or when the kids are asleep. And they tell me that being constantly challenged and getting graded immediately is a huge reinforcer.”

Tamra is pleased with the interactivity and sense of participation Aplia brings to online and hybrid courses. “Aplia makes it possible to practice political science concepts and critical thinking. I call it a political science laboratory. When a student can practice concepts, they are more deeply absorbed and understood, and they ‘stick’ longer.”

Both Tamra and her students are pleased with the enrichment Aplia offers. “Homework assignments are integrated with maps, charts, and illustrations. There are videos and fun tutorials, too. This is particularly important to millennials, who like a lot of visual stimulation and variety in their environment.”

During her use of Aplia, Tamra has seen her students’ grades improve and plans to align her testing more closely with Aplia assignments. She is also investigating the use of Aplia in the other courses she teaches. “A colleague introduced me to Aplia,” she says, “I plan to expand my own use of it and to introduce it to other instructors at the college as well.”

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