



Christine Weinkauff, Ph.D.

Instructor of Psychology — California State University, San Bernardino

Aplia™ Engages Psychology Students in a Positive Learning Experience

Christine Weinkauff teaches Introduction to Psychology at California State University, San Bernardino while finishing up her Ph.D. in positive psychology and developmental psychology. New to college teaching, Christine uses the Aplia™ online learning solution to engage her students in interacting with the subject matter before they hear about it in lectures. She finds that students come to class prepared, leave the course with a sound understanding of psychology, and outperform students in other intro classes that do not use Aplia. “Aplia makes a positive difference,” she says.

COURSES AND PARTICIPANTS

Most of the 350 students in Christine’s three class sections are traditional freshmen. Others are slightly older with declared majors in a variety of disciplines, or enrolled in pre-nursing and pre-med programs. The college is on the quarter system, so classes meet twice weekly for ten weeks. Christine uses a customized textbook for the course — created with chapters from two Cengage Learning books — in part because she incorporates a significant amount of material on positive psychology, her key area of interest and expertise.

THE CHALLENGES

Christine’s biggest challenge concerns the number of students that she teaches each term. “It’s difficult to connect with them and customize the materials to a broad range of needs,” she says. “Furthermore, just coming to class and hearing a lecture isn’t enough to engage most students in learning the subject matter. They have to interact with it.” When her Cengage Learning representative recommended Aplia, Christine knew right away that it was what she was looking for.

Some of Christine’s students, unaccustomed to the relative rigors of college versus high school, struggle to keep up with their assignments and balk at the amount of reading and homework. In addition, Christine says that introductory psychology is a challenging course in the first place, especially when covered in ten weeks.

The timeframes and workloads that distress her students also force Christine to keep on her toes managing assignments and tests. “There’s a lot of research in psychology on learning and memory, and it all points to multiple-choice and true/false questions as not providing an accurate assessment of learning. So I use fill-in-the-blank exams. They take longer to create and grade, especially with 350 students, but I believe they provide a better indication of who knows the material and who doesn’t,” she says.

THE RESULTS

With Aplia, Christine’s students definitely learn the subject matter. Aplia helps them understand psychology as a science through fresh content, brief engagement and experiential activities that illustrate key concepts, and thought-provoking questions that foster critical thinking skills. Immediate, detailed explanations for every answer enhance student comprehension.

CHALLENGES

- **Introductory psychology students, most of whom are freshmen, need motivation** to undertake increased levels of reading and homework encountered in college.
- **Lectures can’t provide the interactivity that promotes learning.** Large enrollments make it impossible for instructors to personally engage with all students.
- **Instructors continually seek ways to improve outcomes** while promoting positive learning experiences.

SOLUTIONS

- Aplia
- Compton, William C., *Introduction to Positive Psychology*
- Rathus, Spencer A., *Psychology: Concepts and Connections, Brief Version*

RESULTS

- **Auto-graded assignments hold students accountable** for the material before they come to class, thereby increasing their effort and engagement.
- **Students are guided to deeper understanding with interactive exercises,** experiential activities, thought-provoking questions, and immediate feedback. Auto-graded assignments save instructors time, and free them to enrich lectures by going beyond the book.
- **The majority of students who used Aplia received A’s and B’s, outperforming their peers.** In a face-to-face course evaluation session, student Aplia users said they learned significantly more than friends who took the same courses without Aplia.

“At first, some students complained . . . that the Aplia questions made them think. That’s precisely the point. Aplia isn’t about regurgitating what they read — it’s about understanding the material.”

Christine Weinkauff
Instructor of Psychology,
California State University
San Bernardino

To learn more about this and other digital solutions provided by Cengage Learning, visit:
www.cengage.com/DiscoverDigital

Christine appreciates that Aplia’s auto-graded assignments hold students accountable for the material before they come to class, thereby increasing their effort. “Aplia assignments are a big part of their grade, so they’re motivated to read the material and do the work. And when I lecture, they’ve already been exposed to the topics,” she says.

She also finds the conceptual nature of Aplia’s questions to be effective. “At first, some students complained that they couldn’t find the answers in the text, and that the Aplia questions made them think. That’s precisely the point. Aplia isn’t about regurgitating what they read — it’s about understanding the material,” she says. “By mid-term they get it. They use the review function in Aplia, look over the material that they struggled with earlier, and walk into the test really prepared. That’s a huge shift.”

Christine says it’s a “luxury” to know that students have read and interacted with the material before class. “With Aplia, I have the freedom to go beyond what they learned in the book. I can show videos, introduce new research, and discuss topics in greater depth.

The feedback on Aplia is positive. “In a face-to-face course evaluation session, students all talked about how much time it took, but they also talked about how much more they learned. They said they had friends in other intro psych classes that didn’t use Aplia and they felt like they learned so much more. I, too, can see that they leave the course with a deeper understanding of psychology,” she says.

Students’ engagement with Aplia also translates into better performance. “More students received A’s than any other grade. Because I’m a new teacher, I wondered if my tests were too easy, so I compared them to other professors’ exams. The tests were comparable, yet my students outperformed students in classes that didn’t use Aplia.”

Says Christine, “Aplia encourages, and even compels, students to learn differently, and that’s a good thing. It shows students that learning and understanding at the college level requires effort. I think it also demonstrates that if you make the effort, you will perform better in class. In fact, the effort they expend with Aplia is an opportunity for students to develop good study and learning practices that will help them throughout their college career.”

She continues, “I’d love to run a test with two sections of intro psych using the same textbook, lectures, and exams, and with Aplia used in one class but not in the other. However, that would create an ethical dilemma because I think I would short-change the students who didn’t have Aplia.”

California State University
San Bernardino, California



Source Code: 13L-AG0618



Cengage Learning is a leading provider of innovative teaching, learning, and research solutions for academic, professional, and library markets worldwide. The company’s products and services are designed to foster academic excellence and professional development, increase engagement, improve learning outcomes, and deliver authoritative information to people whenever and wherever they need it. Through the company’s unique position within both the library and academic markets, Cengage Learning is providing integrated learning solutions that bridge from the library to the classroom. www.cengage.com

Copyright ©2013 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved.