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Integrated Developmental Reading & Writing Students and Instructors Derive Big Benefits from Aplia™

It's often said that everything about Texas is big. That holds true for the size of the student body — nearly 30,000 learners — at San Jacinto College in the greater Houston area. It also holds true for English instructor Tanya Stanley's level of dedication to helping her students succeed. Tanya teaches college success as well as integrated reading and writing courses at the community college, and uses the Aplia™ online learning solution to give her students the advantages of instant feedback, deliberate practice, and support for their varied skill levels.

COURSES AND PARTICIPANTS

Tanya's integrated reading and writing course is taught face to face and includes 20 students in each of three sections. Learners represent a range of ages, cultures, reading/writing skills, and comfort levels with technology. Most work full time.

Having had prior experience with Aplia in other courses, she “knew Aplia would help students learn the reading and writing concepts within the course,” and observes that “the content of the Aplia assignments mirrors the same integration of reading and writing” that she addresses with the *Fusion* text and within her class sessions.

THE CHALLENGES

Because her class is part of her state's course redesign initiative, Tanya must ensure that her course aligns with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) outcomes for Integrated Reading/Writing.

Of course, Tanya also has to ensure that she engages her students as well. She says: “To learn and gain confidence, they need to be actively involved, and for that, they need to be interested.”

Though getting students up to speed on online resources can also be a challenge, Cengage Learning's service helped make the setup process smooth. “Brian Lokesak, our Digital Solutions Coordinator, made our transition in the fall 2012 semester effortless. Our representative, Cyndy Mylowe, has also assisted our department's individual instructors by helping the students register for their CengageBrain accounts and helping students gain access to the Aplia course site.”

THE RESULTS

Aplia for Integrated Developmental Reading and Writing provides diagnostic tests, clear instruction, interactive assignments, and constructive feedback that reinforce key concepts and provide the practice that students need to build fundamental reading and writing skills.

continued



CHALLENGES

- **Students who are unmotivated and/or prone to procrastination** are at risk of falling behind and doing poorly.
- **Individualized attention promotes the practice** necessary to build and retain reading and writing skills, but isn't always available.
- **Efficient assessment and grading** are ongoing objectives.

SOLUTIONS

- Aplia for Integrated Reading and Writing
- Dave Kemper, Verne Meyer, John Van Rys, & Patrick Sebranek, *Fusion: Integrated Reading and Writing, Book 2*

RESULTS

- **Aplia increases engagement** by holding students accountable for the material, assuring that they come to class prepared. Teachers can use class time more productively because students are familiar with topics and don't need as much basic instruction.
- **Instant, constructive feedback** and the ability to repeat exercises encourage review and practice, especially when students make mistakes. Diverse, interactive exercises benefit students with various learning styles and skill levels.
- **Auto-graded assignments save instructors time.** Diagnostic tests provide an overall picture of class performance, allowing instructors to see where students need additional help and tailor lectures accordingly.

“[With Aplia], students are more responsible for their learning, and that helps with engagement as well as with overall results and grades.”

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Also important to Tanya: Aplia presents the concepts in the THECB outcomes in a number of ways, allowing students to gain a deeper understanding of them. Aplia's Practice Reviews reinforce the concepts, thus reducing the need for additional exams. "Students practice what they do not understand, so the learning becomes more authentic for each student of the course."

In Tanya's opinion, instant feedback is the biggest benefit of Aplia. "Students gain a better understanding of concepts when they can see what they didn't get right, and then have a chance to review the material and attempt the exercise again. Feedback motivates deliberate practice when students realize there's a gap in what they know, and the practice helps them achieve content mastery."

She continues, "If students score below 80, I require them to go back and do another attempt, and I count the highest grade. As I tell them, the most important thing is that they know the content." Tanya also says that Aplia's diverse exercises, which incorporate visuals, animations, and interactivity, effectively address the equally diverse learning styles and skill levels of her students.

With Aplia, students come to class prepared for the day's discussion. "Our class interactions are more meaningful because students are familiar with the topics and how they apply to reading and writing. I don't have to spend an hour and a half lecturing on the basics," says Tanya. "Students are more responsible for their learning, and that helps with engagement as well as with overall results and grades."

Tanya takes good advantage of Aplia's tools and resources. In addition to the weekly assignments, she uses the diagnostic tests that Aplia provides at the beginning of the course to help her gauge students' proficiency. With the Aplia course management tools, she posts links to relevant videos to further promote student engagement. With the gradebook, she tracks students' performance (and relishes not having to grade homework). "I can even customize Aplia assignments by adding or eliminating questions. I can fit Aplia to whatever I want to do," she says—and she notes that this makes her online interactions as authentic as her face-to-face instruction.

Tanya has seen an improvement in students' grades and confidence—as well as their satisfaction. "In course surveys, I ask students how Aplia helped them in terms of understanding the content. In my most recent class, 74% said that Aplia was very effective," says Tanya. "That's big."

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