



Delia Samuel, Ph.D., Mathematics

Instructor of Mathematics — Century College

Enhanced WebAssign® Delivers Flexible Solution for Online Intermediate Algebra Course

Delia Samuel has taught mathematics for nearly 25 years, including three at Century College in White Bear Lake, Minnesota. Student success is central to Century College's mission, so Delia is a good fit for the community college — because finding creative new ways to help her students succeed is always top of mind. This quest led Delia to Enhanced WebAssign® (EWA), which serves as a one-stop teaching and learning solution for her online intermediate algebra course. EWA pulls problems from Delia's Cengage Learning textbook and enhances them with interactive tutorials, video solutions, and links to relevant eBook pages. She particularly appreciates EWA for the instant feedback and support that help her students build their math skills, and for the automatic grading that saves her time.

COURSES AND PARTICIPANTS

The algebra course has 41 students. Many are non-traditional learners who are parents, full-time employees, rusty from having been away from school for years — and very busy. Most of the students are in the course as a requirement for future study in higher mathematics, the sciences, or economics. Some like math and some do not, but while their feelings about being in an algebra class range from displeasure to enthusiasm, Delia says they all want to succeed. Students complete all of their assignments (homework, quizzes, and tests) online. They can also access supplemental review questions that are available in EWA to help them prepare for exams.

THE CHALLENGES

Delia's biggest challenge is motivating students, particularly those who have had negative experiences with math. She considers herself to be part instructor, part motivational coach. "I do my best to encourage students, assuring them that mathematics is challenging but doable. I try to ingrain that positive expectation in them, and it helps them believe in themselves," she says.

Another issue is finding innovative ways to teach a diverse group of learners, including being able to provide enough support to students while they do their assignments. Delia asks students to write a brief "math autobiography" when they begin the course, and uses their descriptions to identify ways to best help them. "Let's say they studied composite functions earlier but were baffled. I think about how to introduce the topic in a way that they will find enjoyable and easier to understand," she says. "Every class is different, so I need to continually tailor my teaching strategies."

For students, the biggest challenge is balancing school and life responsibilities. "Some have two jobs, some are single parents, some have four kids and no child care," says Delia. "Online classes are popular because these students don't have time to come to campus. They must find time at home to do their assignments, and they need resources that can keep them engaged despite the whirlwind that may be happening around them."

CHALLENGES

- **Motivating and engaging students who dislike or are intimidated by algebra** is particularly difficult.
- **One-on-one support benefits students** as they do their homework, but instructors can't possibly provide that level of attention.
- **Busy non-traditional students**, including single parents and those working two jobs, need flexible course formats and resources.

SOLUTIONS

- Enhanced WebAssign®
- Gustafson, R. David & Jeff Hughes, *Elementary and Intermediate Algebra*

RESULTS

- **Immediate feedback directs students to helpful resources** when they make a mistake, engaging them in active learning. **Self-paced learning reduces feelings of intimidation.** Multiple takes (allowed at instructor's discretion) entice students to practice concepts that they find difficult, reinforcing skill development.
- **Students get the help they need when they work on their own** with step-by-step worked examples, video solutions, and other resources that provide guidance for every problem.
- **Available 24/7, web-based EWA** allows students to complete their homework when and where they have the time.

“I spend a lot of time seeking creative ways to promote student engagement and success. Enhanced WebAssign is a great partner in helping me to do that.”

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THE RESULTS

Delia and her students are fans of the instant feedback that EWA provides. She allows three submissions for each problem, which encourages students to engage with the material when they make an error. “Students like knowing whether or not they are on the right track. If they answer a question incorrectly, they can do it again. In fact, EWA prompts them when they make an error, asking them if they want to see an example, watch a video presentation of the concept, or practice another version of the problem before coming back to the original,” she says.

Interactive resources provide students with one-on-one support when they do their assignments. They can do their homework whenever they want within the timeframe that Delia allows. “They have resources at every step that go beyond the scope of a textbook, and which are available when an instructor isn’t,” says Delia. “If they don’t understand a problem, they get the help that they need without having to wait a few days for the instructor to grade assignments. It’s fantastic.”

Together, the instant feedback and guided support promote skill development and concept reinforcement. “Learning mathematics is about practice — you have to just practice, practice, and practice. EWA encourages students to practice until they understand the concept. I love that.”

Delia saves time by not having to post or grade assignments, and the EWA gradebook allows her to easily monitor students’ progress and performance. “With EWA handling grading for me, I have more time to focus on my teaching,” she says. EWA also simplifies test creation by providing a vast selection of questions — Delia can choose questions from her Cengage Learning textbook as well as from other Cengage Learning mathematics texts.

Training and technical support are always close at hand. “WebAssign is very user-friendly, and offers great support for instructors and students,” says Delia. “If students have difficulty accessing assignments, they can get help with one click, or chat with someone if they need to.”

For an instructor keen on keeping her teaching fresh with new tools and techniques, EWA answers the call with continual enhancements that keep it attuned to the changing needs of students and instructors. “I spend a lot of time seeking creative ways to promote student engagement and success,” says Delia. “Enhanced WebAssign is a great partner in helping me to do that.”

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