

R. Scott Domowicz, MBA, MIOS

Program Director, Network & Database Administrator, Business & Information Management; Director of Curriculum & Faculty Development —
Erie Institute of Technology

Students Give MindTap™ High Marks for Helping to Improve Grades

R. Scott Domowicz is program director for two departments and Director of Curriculum and Faculty Development at Erie Institute of Technology (EIT) in Erie, Pennsylvania. The technical and trade school provides associate degree programs in computer, electronics, manufacturing, and technology careers. Scott and other members of the institute's faculty, who are enthusiastic about technology and its role in teaching and learning, integrated MindTap™ into the curriculum two years ago. Built on authoritative Cengage Learning content, MindTap replaces traditional textbooks in EIT's medical terminology, anatomy and physiology, marketing, and business communications courses, providing an online interactive learning experience.

The move to MindTap was an easy decision, for reasons apart from its contemporary format and technical appeal. "We are a predominantly Cengage facility," says Scott. "Cengage material is current, relevant, at a reading level that students can comprehend, and well supported by supplementary material and timely technical assistance. We utilize many of Cengage Learning's Engagement Services, including training and technical support. Customer service sets Cengage apart."

Student performance validates MindTap was a good choice. "Most of our students have nothing but positive things to say about MindTap — and their grades demonstrate that. We have seen an increase of at least one letter grade when we compare the performance of students who used MindTap with those who didn't."

COURSES AND PARTICIPANTS

Classes at EIT are seated, with approximately 12 students in each class. The student population consists of traditional college-age learners and older adults seeking training or a new career.

EIT is also considering blended, online, and flipped course formats. "Today's students want to have course materials at their fingertips, digitally. They want to sit at home and 'go to class' by flipping up their notebook computers. But most of them still want one-on-one interaction with an instructor, which is why we keep our classes small. Engaging today's students in class requires conscientious, talented instructors. Motivating students outside of class requires tools like MindTap."

THE CHALLENGES

Keeping up with new technology is time-consuming for Scott and his colleagues. "In many of the fields that we teach, what we know today will be obsolete in six months," he says. "As technology evolves, we have to learn the new material and then translate it into appropriate lesson plans in a format that students can understand."

Finding ways to successfully capture and hold students' attention is another issue. "This generation is unlike previous generations. They're not willing to just sit in a classroom and listen to a lecture," he says. "They engage via YouTube, text messaging, and social networks. If we don't adjust and reach out with new tools that engage them on their terms, we'll lose them."



CHALLENGES

- **Time spent grading assignments and meeting with students** makes it difficult to devote the time needed to keep up with technologies.
- **Students with diverse learning styles**, including the YouTube generation (which can be apathetic about traditional lecture settings), need learning resources that meet them on their own terms.
- **Ongoing initiative seeks to improve performance assessment and achieve better outcomes.**

SOLUTIONS

- Guffey/Loewy, MindTap for *Essentials of Business Communication*
- Daft, MindTap for *Management*
- Warren/Reeve/Duchas, MindTap for *Principles of Accounting 1*
- Rizzo, MindTap for *Fundamentals of Anatomy and Physiology*
- Ehrlich/Schroeder, MindTap for *Medical Terminology for Health Professions*
- Baldauf, *Emerge with Computer Concepts*
- SAM (Skills Assessment Manager), online learning environment for Microsoft® Office

RESULTS

- **Automatic grading of assignments, with feedback**, frees up time for instructors who need to continually learn about evolving technologies
- **MindTap addresses a range of learning styles** with interactive, multimedia resources and social media connectivity; and **can be used on multiple platforms** (desktop, laptops, and tablets) for anytime, anywhere access.
- **Performance improved by at least one letter grade** among MindTap users, compared to non-users in the same course. Instructors can identify problem areas and at-risk students, and provide targeted remediation with performance analytics.

“MindTap is the tool of the future for engaging students. With Cengage Learning, the future is here today.”

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Director of Curriculum & Faculty Development,
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THE RESULTS

MindTap was created for student engagement. More than an eBook, MindTap guides students through their course by combining readings, multimedia, activities, and assessments in a singular Learning Path — with all resources instantly accessible. It also offers web apps and social media tools – called MindApps – that meet today’s students in their comfort zone.

Scott’s students particularly gravitate to ConnectYard, a MindApp that allows faculty and students to interact via email, text message, Facebook, and Twitter, while maintaining complete privacy between instructor and student. “With ConnectYard, I can post a current event and ask students to comment, thereby engaging them in learning after they leave class. The world becomes their classroom.”

Based on students’ grades, which jumped at least one letter grade when compared to students taking the same courses without MindTap, engagement is translating into better outcomes. Students also like the platform flexibility that MindTap offers — they can take assignments at home or school, or review their reading on their iPads as they ride the bus.

EIT instructors who use technical products appreciate MindTap because it leaves more time for becoming knowledgeable in new technologies. “MindTap allows instructors to use their time to the fullest. They spend fewer hours grading assignments and developing material to supplement lecture content. From an administration point of view, I know that they are using their time more effectively, and they tell me the same.”

Instructors also like the ease of creating assignments, the automatic grading, the feedback provided to students, and the fact that the MindTap gradebook is integrated with Erie’s learning management system (LMS). “Analytical information on performance allows us to see which students are at risk and which ones are not, and which concepts the class as a whole is or isn’t understanding,” says Scott. “In addition, MindTap is cloud-based, so Cengage always ensures that we have the most up-to-date content and functionality.”

Scott is a “test pilot” for enhancements to MindTap, most recently with the introduction of student analytics. “They’ll provide a greater array of data points on performance, which we can use to identify students who require additional help and what their problems are, and consequently, better guide the direction of the class. That’s exciting for us,” he says. “MindTap is the tool of the future for engaging students. With Cengage Learning, the future is here today.”

Erie Institute of Technology
Erie, Pennsylvania



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