Sandy Keeter

Professor of Information Technology, Seminole State College

Hand Grading and Paperwork Become Overwhelming, Until SAM Lightens the Load

Sandy Keeter has been teaching at Seminole State College since 1994, but has been a computer "trainer" since the early 80s. At Seminole, she teaches a variety of classes in Microsoft Office, both on-campus and online, including Introduction to Office Applications, which is offered as an online or hybrid course. As a former Air Force officer, Keeter previously worked with IBM on a project to "modernize" DOD computer systems, and she also taught Air Force ROTC students at the University of Florida.

Not too many years ago, Keeter and her colleagues in Information Technology at Seminole were struggling with how to manage the overwhelming amount of hand grading that came with the multiple-choice testing they used. "It was very tedious to grade and give solid feedback for every assignment and test," said Keeter. "In fact, we couldn't do it. As enrollment increased, some instructors abandoned collecting bookwork all together, because it was just impossible to stay on top of the workload." Additionally, there was no consistency between instructors when it came to grading and feedback, as everyone was 'doing their own thing' and using different rubrics and methods of receiving feedback.

Her intuition (and perhaps her military training) told her there had to be a better way. Keeter set out to find a digital solution that would help instructors manage the grading. "At that time, we didn't even consider other features, we just wanted help with the grading." They turned to Cengage Learning's SAM Assessment/Training/Projects with MindTap Reader.

STUDENTS BECOME MORE ENGAGED

SAM, which gave Seminole's students access to the same textbook content and pedagogy they had been using (the Shelly/Cashman series) is a personalized, fully online digital learning platform of authoritative content, assignments, and services that allows instructors to configure coursework and manage grading, feedback, and communication.

"When we first went with SAM, some instructors were apprehensive at first—with small class sizes, some felt their jobs might be threatened—but soon everyone saw the benefits," said Keeter. "SAM helped us accommodate those larger class sizes and bring up retention rates."

There have been many pleasant surprises to integrating SAM into her courses that go far beyond the time she saves with grading and feedback. "Students are learning way better than they used to," Keeter said. "First of all, they're getting multiple attempts to get a problem right, which was unheard of before SAM, because there were just too many students to re-grade anything. And the SAM grading comes with amazing feedback." For instance, when students open up a study guide report, SAM shows them where they

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CHALLENGES

- Multiple-choice testing with hand grading of all homework assignments and testing caused instructors to become overwhelmed, and prevented them from giving thoughtful and solid feedback

- As class sizes increased, some instructors stopped collecting and grading the homework assignments due to time constraints.

- Within the department, instructors weren't using consistent rubrics, which created a lack of consistency and feedback in the course.

SOLUTIONS

- Vermaat's *Microsoft Office 2013 Introductory*, First Edition, part of the Shelly/Cashman Series

- SAM 2013 Assessment/Training/ Projects with MindTap Reader

RESULTS

- Improved student completion and retention rates—the percentage of students passing the course went from 60% to 75% once SAM became fully embedded in courses.

- Seminole can now accommodate larger class sizes while increasing retention rates

can go for remediation in the textbook (ebook or print) and provides a training link they can use when there isn't an actual person there to help them. "This gives students a sense of accomplishment, and I see a lot of gratification in earning that '100' – it wasn't just handed to them, they earned it."

Personally, Keeter says that SAMs reporting capabilities she likes most. "SAM's individual performance reports allow us to see practice tests and where students encountered problems, while project incident reports reveal if they shared or borrowed work from others," she said. "I hate having to check up on students, but with so many in a class, it's tough to know when cheating might be going on. SAM catches the vast majority of that." There is also a frequency report, which gives Keeter an indication of what to cover more in her course, based on what students are not comprehending. "The frequency report alerts me to what's not going well with the class," she said. "SAM's varied reporting is so good that we are able to troubleshoot a lot better."

Students in Keeter's online and hybrid classes have reacted favorably to the use of SAM. They love the interactivity and the ability to use different skill-based assessments, interactive trainings, and comprehensive remediation to help them master the latest Microsoft Office programs on their own. "Students feel as if they are 'wasting' time when they just listen to my lecture; they prefer actual 'doing' instead. With SAM, I've seen that students will stay engaged and alert, and work through the project in full."

SAM RESULTS IN BETTER OUTCOMES

Since implementing SAM into the various information technology courses at Seminole, Keeter and her colleagues report improved student engagement, an increase in the critical thinking among students, and a significant reduction in time spent by instructors on paperwork. Additionally, SAM appeals to students and instructors alike, for so many reasons. "The look and feel of the program is so nice," said Keeter. "It's intuitive; students get into SAM and begin working before they even get into their LMS. SAM gives them the background and then requires students to think critically in order to solve problems. Students have to think about the various pieces of the project in order to complete it – they can't guess their way through it. Students also become competitive in SAM; they can't stand turning in their work and getting a bad score. They want to get 100% in the class, so they'll work on a assignment until they get the best score possible." Keeter appreciates the fact that SAM allows students to practice and retry until they achieve success. "Because they work through multiple attempts, students truly understand the concepts with the projects they're doing."

Keeter is grateful that the 'SAM experience' allows her to focus on the real problem areas in class, while providing that instant grading and feedback outside of class that the college so desperately needed. "I have more time to teach and it takes less time to accomplish the grading and other things SAM can do for me." But mostly, Keeter is glad that her students are doing better and seem to enjoy classes more. "Completion and retention rates have improved," she said. "The passing rate went from 60% to 75% and withdrawals went down, too."