

Improving Student Economics Skills With Digital Learning Tools:
A Study of the Impact of Aplia
on Student Learning

ABOUT THE STUDY



About Aplia

Aplia is an online learning solution that provides interactive chapter assignments correlating to specific textbooks. Aplia makes use of tutorials, news analysis, experiments and other multimedia features to maintain learner interest. As learners complete online assignments, they receive immediate grades and automatic feedback on each problem set. Assignments are automatically graded and entered into the instructor's Aplia Gradebook, enabling instructors to focus on less labor-intensive and higher-impact areas of teaching. Aplia coursework is available for use with more than **200 textbooks** across **21 disciplines** including business communication, economics, finance and statistics.

This comprehensive research study examines one of the most widely used digital tools in post-secondary education, Cengage Learning's Aplia, an online learning solution dedicated to improving student learning by increasing student effort and engagement.

MarketingWorks and SEG Measurement, two independent research firms, conducted a study of Aplia's effectiveness in microeconomics classes in the fall of 2013. The study explored faculty and student use of and perceptions of the product through a series of surveys, interviews, and focus groups. In addition, a quasi-experimental study of Aplia's effectiveness was conducted to determine the extent to which Aplia users improved their economics knowledge and skills more than a control group of users who used the same textbooks but without Aplia.

Over 780 students and 24 instructors in as many institutions of higher education were involved in the semester-long study.

Aplia Receives High Marks from Instructors

Overall, the 12 instructors using Aplia in their microeconomics courses had a very positive experience. At the conclusion of the semester, average ratings of instructors' overall experience with Aplia was 3.3 on a scale of 1 to 4, a solid B+. Instructors also felt that Aplia met the needs of students with a wide range of capabilities (average rating 3.1 out of 4).

Instructors Praise Aplia for Improving Teaching

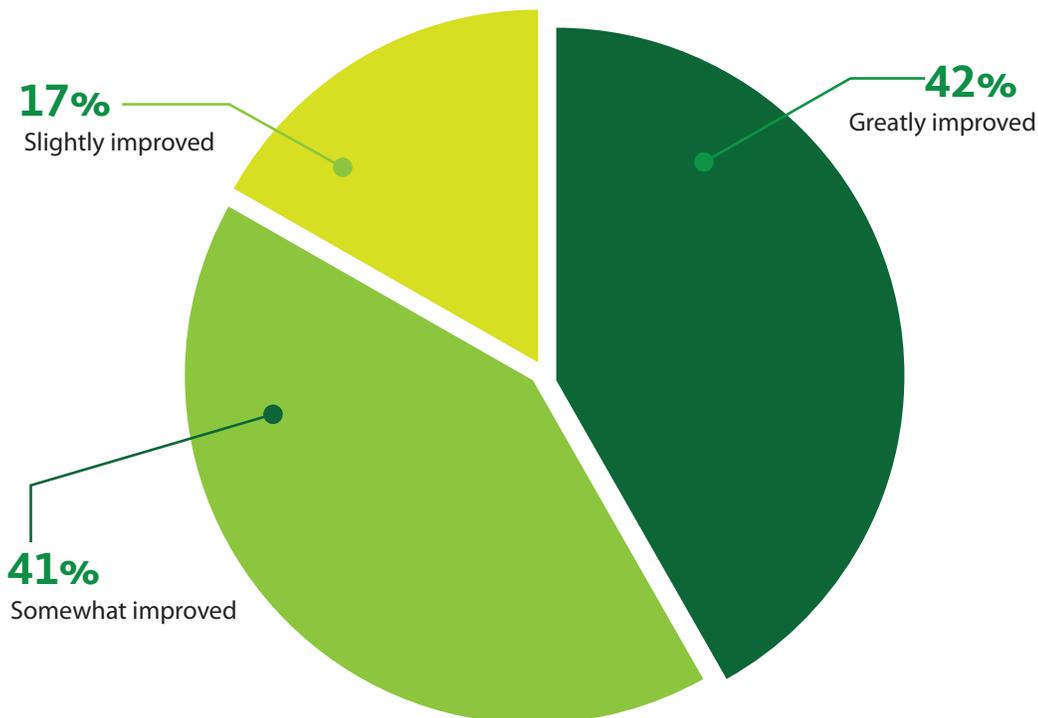
Most instructors felt that Aplia made teaching easier and better (average rating of 3.4 on a scale of 1 to 4). The average rating of the 12 instructors was highest for Aplia's helpfulness in reducing time grading assignments (average rating of 4.7 out of 5) and in the help Aplia gave in tracking students' progress more easily (average rating of 4.3).

And Improving Learning...

Instructors generally agreed that Aplia contributed to the improvement of student learning outcomes, with 42% saying outcomes were greatly improved, 42% saying somewhat improved, and 17% saying slightly improved.

Figure 1

Instructors Believe Aplia Improves Learning Outcomes



"Aplia drastically reduces my workload. It made tracking student progress easy. It saved me a lot of time and energy on grading problem sets, which allows me to spend more time on prepping active classroom activities."

Hillary Sackett
Westfield State University

“Aplia has a long track record that over the years has become almost flawless in dependability and teaching skills. It is a turnkey package that allows you to set it once and watch it go.”

William Aldridge

University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa

“Many different types of questions help the different learning styles.”

Dennis Debrecht

Carroll College Waukesha

And almost all of the instructors (84%) felt that Aplia assignments helped students better understand course concepts and application of the material to real-world situations.

In addition, three-quarters of the instructors felt that Aplia helped to get students through their course and kept them focused on areas where they needed the most help either extremely well (25%) or somewhat well (50%).

Aplia’s Grade It Now, which provides immediate feedback and explanations, was particularly well reviewed by instructors, with all but one saying it worked either extremely well (67%) or somewhat well (25%) to help students overcome homework roadblocks.

Students Applaud Aplia

Three-quarters of the 222 students using Aplia responding to a survey at the end of the semester agreed that using Aplia had helped them better understand the course material. Just about half (49%) rated their overall experience with Aplia as an 8, 9, or 10, and half said they would be interested in accessing Aplia after they had completed the course.

In addition, over 70% agreed with the following statements:

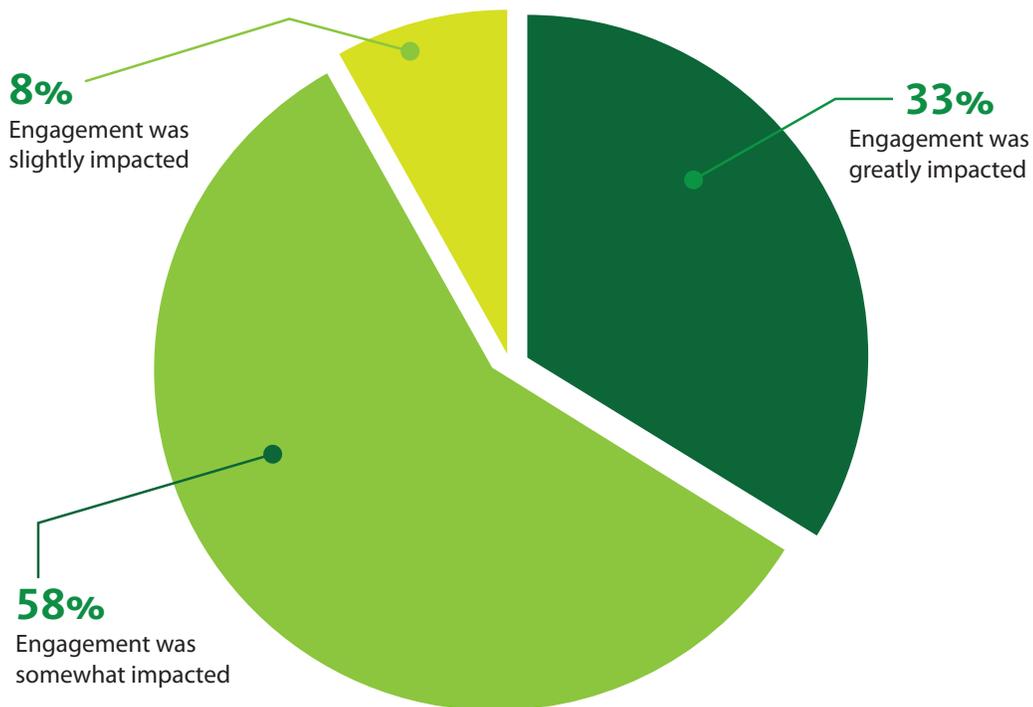
- Aplia helped me understand the course assignments and due dates (83% agreed)
- Using Aplia extended the learning process beyond the classroom (76%)
- Using Aplia provided a new way to learn the material (75%)
- Aplia helped maximize the effectiveness of my homework (74%)
- The feedback and explanations provided in Aplia helped me learn the material (74%)
- Aplia helped me to better understand difficult graphing concepts (73%)
- Using Aplia helped me pinpoint areas where I am having problems (71%)
- Using Aplia reinforced my learning (70%)

Aplia Enhances Student Engagement

Ninety-three percent of instructors also felt that students were either very engaged or somewhat engaged with the coursework, and all felt that students' engagement was positively impacted by their use of Aplia.

Figure 2

Student Engagement Is Positively Impacted by Aplia



“It is a great tool for becoming an effective teacher. It made my teaching a lot simpler and made me a more effective teacher. You just focus on teaching, and Aplia will take care of everything else.”

Sharanjit Toor
University of Maryland
Baltimore County

“I can devote more time to active learning since students are better prepared.”

Miren Ivankovic
Clemson University

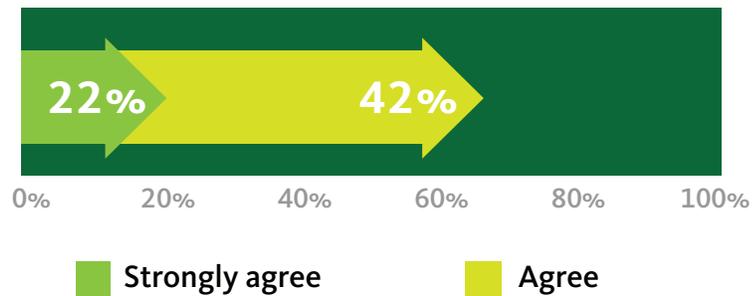
"I'm definitely learning more than I would otherwise, especially with Grade It Now. I really like knowing what I did wrong and how to correct it as opposed to having to email the professor asking questions. It's all right in front of you."

Renee Taft
Westfield State College

Students and Instructors Express Strong Loyalty to Aplia

The strongest indicator of loyalty to a product is the willingness to recommend it to someone else. In the Aplia research:

Almost two-thirds of the students agreed with the statement: "I would recommend the use of Aplia to other students taking this course."



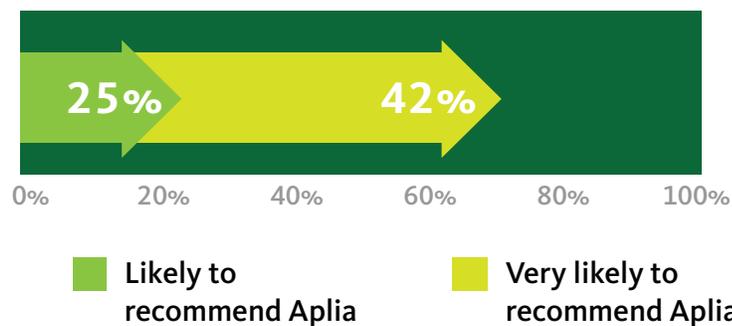
Half of the students said they would be interested in access to Aplia after they had completed the course.



If given the choice, 72% said that they would use Aplia in courses they take in the future.



Two-thirds of instructors said they would be very likely or likely to recommend Aplia to colleagues at their own and at other institutions.



Conclusion

Overall, instructors and students had a very positive experience with Aplia in their microeconomics courses. At the conclusion of the semester, average ratings of treatment instructors' overall experience with Aplia was 3.3 on a scale of 1 to 4, a solid B+. Reflecting instructors' generally positive experiences, two-thirds said they would be very likely (42%) or likely (25%) to recommend Aplia to colleagues at their own and at other institutions.

Just about half of the students (49%) rated their overall experience with Aplia as an 8, 9, or 10. Reflecting their generally positive reactions, almost two-thirds of the students (64%) said that they would recommend Aplia to other students taking this course and half said they would be interested in accessing Aplia after they had completed the course.



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