



Ulanda Forbess

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Aplia™ Promotes Preparedness, Streamlines Assessment in Developmental Reading and Writing

As higher education institutions seek new ways to help students move successfully through the curriculum, one trend is the integration of developmental reading and writing. Such is the case at campuses in the Dallas County Community College District (DCCCD), where Ulanda Forbess teaches and coordinates the developmental reading and writing program. She has been using the Aplia™ online homework and learning solution for a year to help guide her students to reading and writing proficiency. “Overall, the experience has been excellent and the students are learning what we need them to learn to be successful,” says Ulanda.

INCREASED INSTRUCTOR WORKLOAD NECESSITATES DIGITAL SOLUTIONS

Ulanda’s department first used Aplia for developmental reading, so it was a natural step to consider it for the integrated course. Other factors drove the decision, too. “When you combine two curriculums, there’s no time to cover all the content as much as we would like to in class—some has to be covered outside of class,” she says. “We also wanted students to have immediate feedback to improve their skills, and we couldn’t always do that ourselves, especially with the increased topic coverage. We needed technology to help us.”

DIAGNOSTICS FACILITATE PRODUCTIVE CLASS TIME

Aplia has done more than accommodate Ulanda’s needs—it has added value to the teaching and learning experience. She teaches face-to-face and online courses, and organizes and selects Aplia assignments to reinforce topics presented in class. “We like that Aplia can be customized for students and instructors. It offers each student an individualized path based on performance on a diagnostic test. We don’t waste quality time on something students already know and can spend time developing the skills they need help with,” she says. In addition to diagnostic tests, Aplia provides clear instruction, interactive assignments, and constructive feedback to reinforce concepts and provide the practice students need to build fundamental reading and writing skills.

AUTO-GRADING AND REPORTING TOOLS SIMPLIFY ASSESSMENT

“We also use Aplia for assessment and for identifying problem areas,” says Ulanda. “I go into Aplia before class to see how students are doing with the topic I’ll be covering. Instruction in class is followed by Aplia ‘lab time,’ when I spend individual time with students. Reserving this time to work with Aplia, and seeing the immediate feedback, allows me to recognize where particular students are having problems. I can then give them additional assignments (within Aplia) that focus on specific concepts so they can practice and learn the content.”

CHALLENGES

- Integrated reading and writing courses cover virtually the same material as two separate courses, leaving less class time to cover each topic and requiring instructors to find ways to get through the content efficiently.
- Developmental reading and writing students often struggle with the course material, require lots of practice and individual guidance to build skills and preparedness, and can be resistant to investing the time needed to succeed.
- Efficient assessment and grading are ongoing objectives, especially when combined courses increase the instructor workload and content that must be covered.

SOLUTIONS

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

RESULTS

- Aplia’s auto-graded exercises reduce the time needed to cover certain concepts in class by offering instruction as well as skill and concept reinforcement outside of class.
- Interactive reading, writing, and grammar exercises—with constructive feedback—engage students, provide practice and individual attention, and promote development of fundamental skills.
- Diagnostic tests provide an overall picture of student and class skill levels, allowing instructors to see where students need additional help and tailor lectures and assignments accordingly. Auto-graded exercises save instructors time. Gradebook reports offer informative snapshots of individual and class performance.

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Ulanda says the Aplia gradebook and reporting tools have simplified her role as coordinator of the developmental program. “It is easy for me to log in to classes and immediately see student and class performance. Our classes have dedicated tutors, and I am able to tell the tutors about problem areas and where they need to focus when they meet with the students individually. At the end of the semester I can access detailed analytics of how the classes and individual students did so we can make curriculum changes for the next semester. This used to be tedious and time-consuming, but Aplia has really simplified the task.”

BETTER ENGAGEMENT, BETTER STUDENT PREPARATION

Students have responded positively to Aplia. “Students who use Aplia like it and feel like it gives them the support they need to better understand concepts. One student told me it answered a lot of her questions at home when she was doing her homework. Without Aplia, she may have gotten frustrated with no one available to help.” Ulanda notes that the face time in class with Aplia makes a big difference in the benefits students derive from the course. “Student engagement has really increased. Working on Aplia in class has resulted in more use of Aplia outside of class, too. Students are doing the assignments they need to be doing at home.”

Ulanda also thinks Aplia helps students build foundational skills critical for college success. “This level of learner is sometimes not very independent. I think Aplia will better prepare them for future college courses because they gain the confidence and independence necessary to complete higher-level courses. Instructors in the freshmen composition courses have told us that the students are becoming more independent learners, and we like to think that the curriculum design and the use of technology has better prepared students for the next level.”

Says Ulanda, “I am very pleased with Aplia. I think it is one of the best programs out there. It is very user friendly for both students and instructors. You can use it as much or as little as you want and get a lot of benefit. Also, the tech support has been phenomenal.” She continues, “In fact, we are using MindTap™ for our next level courses, and we chose it because it has Aplia in it.”

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