



Michael O'Neill

Professor of Accounting, Seattle Central Community College

CengageNOW Helps Students Focus on Problem Solving – Not Just Arriving at the Answer

Michael O'Neill has been teaching accounting at Seattle Central Community College since 1980. In those 34 years, he's seen a lot of students come and go, and he knows what to expect from students — and what to watch for at the beginning of the course. As O'Neill explained, early on it's common for students to try to find the fastest route to the answer to a problem, and it becomes obvious that they really don't want to go through all the steps required to think it through. "Many want me to tell them how to start, but I tell them to get out paper and a calculator and start with step one. Some give up. Others try repeatedly and adapt. That's what I'm looking for."

O'Neill knew that he wanted an online companion that would do the same thing— get students thinking about the process, as opposed to focusing on just arriving at the answer. As a previous user of a different online homework program, O'Neill and the other accounting instructors in his department knew from experience they needed an online companion that was easy to set up, navigate, and use; they also wanted one that allowed students to try different, numerous attempts at the same problem. He decided to try CengageNOW, which was available with the textbook he had chosen, Warren et al's venerable *Accounting*, now in its 25th edition.

CengageNOW is an online interactive homework tool that generates a diagnostic Personalized Study Plan (with a chapter-specific Pre-test, Study Plan, and Post-test) to help students master concepts, prepare for exams, and get a better grade.

INTEGRATED LEARNING OBJECTIVES

"CengageNOW appealed to me because of the textbook," said O'Neill. "The program uses the book's learning objectives and I could choose or not choose particular objectives, which became a good way for me to teach what I wanted to teach. I could also have the students do problems in CengageNOW that related to the material, and I was able to add my own problems, that I wrote, to CengageNOW."

As O'Neill explained, the problems within CengageNOW are subtle enough that they cause students to ask questions—which is good. "Some students today think they can get out their phone, find the answer, and it is one step and they are done with the problem. What I find helpful in CengageNOW is that they can't fudge the answer; it gives them practice opportunities for the algorithmic-type problems."

As he and his instructors began using the program, they quickly learned that it's flexibility gives instructors the ability to use it in different ways, in order to suit their own style of teaching. "I use it as a homework guide. I assign it by learning objectives," he said. "Some objectives are very hot, but others may not have as much homework. In the assignment,

CHALLENGES

- Previously used online homework program for accounting was too time consuming and confusing
- Instructor wanted to teach his own way—not dictated by a set program.

SOLUTIONS

- CengageNOW
- Warren/Reeve/Duchac's *Accounting*, 25th Edition

RESULTS

- Students gain true understanding of the concepts
- Instructor is able to establish validity

“CengageNOW helps me give online students a uniform platform that I can trust to measure what they know.”

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I indicate the learning objective, so when I look at an assignment I know whether the student generally achieved that objective.”

STUDENTS SHOW IMPROVEMENT WITH CONCEPT MASTERY

This ability to determine if students are truly mastering concepts is one of O’Neill’s favorite features of CengageNOW. “It helps me help my students truly understand the concepts that I teach, and establish validity, as opposed to copying it from someone else. I want to know that they did the homework and they comprehend how to truly solve the problem.”

O’Neill and his colleagues are all pleased with the program, but most of all they are happy that their students are experiencing better outcomes. “The students all seem to like CengageNOW,” said O’Neill. “I am pleased with their ‘attack’ and they way they use it. They have decided they are going to tackle a problem no matter how much time it takes. CengageNOW helps me give online students a uniform platform that I can trust to measure what they know.”

“CengageNOW has good multiple-step problems, you can write your own to fill in any gaps, and so you have customization,” he said. “I get to teach what I want to teach and CengageNOW helps me make sure the students are learning it.”

Instructors in the accounting department, especially O’Neill, find that the results they see since implementing CengageNOW have been positive. “I can determine when students did the homework,” he said. “And, I have the ability to review homework that has been submitted, see the percentage they got right, and the number of times they tried the problem.” He also enjoys CengageNOW’s easy grading, which allows him to grade uniformly and understand where students are in their comprehension. “I know which problems give them trouble, so I can work with them in solving through a similar type of problem.”

After all these years, O’Neill knows what trips students up—and what helps struggling students. “Most of the time it is inadequate reading of preparatory materials. If a student is trying to do the homework without having read anything, they will run into a jam. I can spot those a mile away. If they have read the textbook, (maybe not clearly enough), they can go through the problems. CengageNOW has been beneficial to them because it reflects the textbook exactly, and allows me to put in review problems for the current “rules”. It allows me to move around the text as I see fit and customize if I see students are having issues. It gives them the practice they need. We’re pleased with the results.”

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