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Challenges

- Printed textbooks can be limited in their ability to engage students and encourage the speaking and interaction outside of class that's needed to develop communicative skills.
- An online model for teaching Spanish presents significant obstacles for a course in which conversation skills are key to language learning and face-to-face discussion is typically the norm.

Solutions

- iLrn Language Learning Center
- *Nexos*, Enhanced 3rd Edition

Results

- Diverse activities and resources promote student engagement and communication competence.
- By allowing students to record and listen to their own speech, and talk to each other and to instructors, iLrn enables online language courses to have the advantage of conversation-focused learning.



Success Story

iLrn™ Facilitates Online Language Learning at Mississippi State University

Amie Russell loves her job — teaching Spanish at Mississippi State University. For three years she has used iLrn™, an all-in-one course management system created specifically for languages, to complement her Cengage Learning Spanish textbook and ensure that her students get valuable practice in communicative skills. “I appreciate that iLrn is flexible,” she says. “We can use it in our face-to-face and online classes. It’s structured in a way that students can understand whenever they are learning on their own, and the cultural elements that are a part of language learning are well illustrated.”

Amie and her colleagues were introduced to iLrn when they selected *Nexos*, Enhanced 3rd Edition. They were drawn to its focus on high-interest cultural themes and meaningful communication. “We wanted to move away from traditional texts based on grammatical structure, and were looking for a resource that focused on communicative skills. We also wanted to get into online learning,” she recalls. “*Nexos* teaches from a conceptual level and with a cultural perspective — for instance, how to communicate at the grocery store rather than how to conjugate verbs. It was accompanied by iLrn, so it was ideal for our needs.”

Students Communicate Online, Just as They Would in Class

iLrn incorporates listening, speaking, reading, and contextualized writing activities, complemented by an array of communication tools and multimedia content. Students can access an audio- and video-enhanced version of their textbook with all media, tutorials, and activities embedded and available when needed. For example, they can review flashcards, click on a term to hear its pronunciation, and then flip the cards to see the definitions. Some activities ask students to record their voices; instructors can listen to the recordings and offer feedback. There’s also a *Share It* feature that encourages students to communicate in Spanish through a social networking tool.

“iLrn helps me better engage the students, especially the online students,” says Amie. “The pronunciation feature, the recorded activities, and the partner activities are very beneficial. Students are able to partner with other students in the class, meet online, and record their activities. This allows for a lot of interactivity. The kinesthetic activities are great, too — for instance, for learning sentence structure, students have to move content around in order for it to make sense. There are some fantastic graphics as well.” Amie also likes how iLrn effectively simulates and reinforces the types of language learning activities that students experience when



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they’re with her. “Students have to repeat words to a native speaker online, which is exactly what I do in my face-to-face classes. This gives them more confidence to use the language without feeling self-conscious.”

Instructors Save Time Assigning and Grading

Amie has found that iLrn provides excellent support for teachers, just as it does for students. Instructors have convenient access to all program elements from their Dashboard, where they can assign, grade, and assess students’ progress. iLrn also saves instructors time creating and grading homework with numerous easy-to-use tools, such as an assignment filter that lets them select the types of activities they want to assign with a click. In addition, many activities and test items are graded automatically. “Assigning the work that I want to use with iLrn and *Nexos* is easier because I can specify the types of assignments through the filtering option. Work is due throughout the week (every night). The interface is also great for students. It’s easy for them to navigate and find the assignments they need to complete.”

“iLrn made me realize how important a good online language learning system is to teaching effectively online,” says Amie. “iLrn compels students to engage with the work, which is what I want to see with online students so they aren’t just staring at the screen. I require the tutorials for my online students because they come close to simulating what students would do in the classroom.”

Amie is pleased with her iLrn experience, from the content and tools to the support from Cengage Learning. “It’s really easy to get great customer service from Cengage. Reps have come here to conduct workshops, and when I give feedback they are very open to passing on my comments. We only recently started teaching online courses, and iLrn has been instrumental in helping us be successful in teaching these courses.”



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